

V. S. SRINIVASA SASTRI

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Builders of Modern India

V. S. SRINIVASA SASTRI

T. N. JAGADISAN

**PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
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PREFACE

It gives me great pleasure to fulfil a long-cherished task—that of writing a biography of the Right Honourable Srinivasa Sastri with whom I came into close association in the last decade of his life.

Regarded as an embodiment of the high moral values of India, Srinivasa Sastri was one of the first of our great men to raise India's esteem in the world by his unsurpassed eloquence, his noble bearing, his serene wisdom and generous understanding of the other man's point of view. He was looked upon as a scholar-statesman comparable in wisdom and experience to Morley, Balfour, Haldane and Asquith.

Like Gokhale and Gandhi, he did the service of spiritualising politics by bringing into its practice the highest moral virtues. Srinivasa Sastri also contributed to politics the breadth of imagination that is an aid to reason and an enemy to fanaticism. Sastri had the ascetic temper too—the temper that sets a man on the lonely pursuit of an ideal, the temper that gives him the strength to renounce approbation and reject the fear of being called weak.

Srinivasa Sastri served his country and mankind with a spirit of dedication that will be a source of inspiration to coming generations. He belongs not only to the galaxy of the Founders of India's Freedom but to the everlasting race of humanists who allure mankind ahead to peace and harmony.

Madras

T. N. JAGADISAN

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CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE

Srinivasa Sastri was born on September 22, 1869, at Valangaiman near Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu. He was the eldest son of Sri Sankaranarayana Sastri and Srimati Balambal, and he had three elder sisters and three brothers younger to him.

It is difficult to look backward through the dark abyss of time, and to capture the atmosphere of a by-gone era. Of the era in which Srinivasa Sastri was born, one statement could safely be made. It was a time of rising political consciousness, spiritual revival and a searching questioning of social evils which had been blindly accepted by ignorant belief and age-old superstition.

With the uprising of 1857, an epoch in the governance of India by the British had ended. The House of Commons resolved to transfer the government of India in name as well as in fact to the Crown. Queen Victoria assumed sovereignty over India, and made her famous declaration binding herself to the people of her Indian Empire by the same obligations of duty as to her other subjects in her other territories. This proclamation spurred as well as pacified the people. A new vision of a self-governing India rose up steadily. If there was an unrest, it was not the unrest of disloyalty. As Sir Surendranath Banerjee put it, "It is the unrest which is the first visible sign of the awakening national life."

The influx of modern ideas had profoundly influenced the inheritors of an ancient civilisation. In fact, this influx, under the mighty influence of Raja Ram Mohun Roy and a galaxy of great Indians of those days, led to the re-discovery of the true greatness of our religion and culture,

purged of its superstitions, evil practices and excrescences. Patriotism and nationalism were in the air, though the spirit of loyalty to the British throne was firm and unshaken. The influence of such Viceroys as Lord Canning and Lord Ripon and people of vision on both sides, who were alike students of Burke, Mill and Gladstone, sustained the vision of a process of peaceful and orderly development of self-governance in India within the Brittanic fold. With the school of thought headed by Dadabhai Naoroji and Mahadev Govind Ranade at that time, it was an article of faith that the inscrutable dispensation of Providence had brought India and England together.

Srinivasan was born in poverty, but inherited a good brain and noble character. There was a marked strain of unworldliness and renunciation in his ancestry. Near the bank of the river in his birth place are three *samadhis* (sacred tombs)—those of Srinivasa Sastri's grandfather, great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather. They had all embraced *sanyas* in ripe old age, renouncing domestic attachments after long years of righteous *grahastasrama* (life of a householder). Srinivasa Sastri's father too had meant to embrace *sanyas* in his last years, but he was deprived of the fulfilment of this devout wish by sudden death owing to heart failure.

Srinivasan's father was of the priestly class, but having no regular clientele, had to forage far and near for a bare subsistence. He was strict in the observance of religious rites, unambitious and not equal to the competitive struggles of his profession, generous to a fault, and full of warm emotions. He was explosive in temper and could use harsh words on occasions. Young Srinivasan who observed the ill effects of such violent outbursts resolved to control his emotions. Thus, at a very early age he had learnt to behave with restraint.

The influence of his mother on Srinivasan seems to have been more decisive. He writes of his mother : "My mother, born in a secular family, was proud by nature, and as soon as I could understand, used to confide to me her humiliation at the privation, which he (my father) endured and the insults which he submitted to from the well-to-do. She had a melancholy and pious disposition and by unwearyed resort to street expositions of scripture, garnered a vast deal of mythological lore. She found in me an eager listener." The little boy was thus pushed before his time into the dark mysteries of sin, hell's torments and the malignancies of the devils. He scarcely slept without a prolonged nightmare in which horrifying goblins danced weird dances and made faces at him. Relief came to him only with the morning when he woke up with his body perspiring and unrefreshed. But he had also some comforting dreams. Late in his life, Sastri recalled one such dream :

"One in particular gave me an ecstasy of religious satisfaction so much so that I did not expect a sympathetic hearing from anyone and would not share it even with my mother. It goes on record now for the first time. As I lay asleep praying in a boy's way for salvation the sky was suffused with a soft glow, out of which the eye glimpsed parts of a divine figure, filling the firmament, recumbent, face earthward. The outline filled in quickly, the light became brighter, and the form of Maha Vishnu, with majestic beauty, disclosed itself to my enraptured vision. He lay, head north and feet south. To the right and left were ranged gods and goddesses and *munis* familiar in our story. At the same time the splendour of the great one increased beyond description. But, I knew not how, my eye, more fortunate than Arjuna's could gaze and adore and not be blinded. At the culmination the effulgence seemed, as I recollected the trance in later years, to admit of only one

description, if description it may be called. Let the reader turn to the twelfth sloka in the *Gita* chapter of the All-comprehending Form. 'If a thousand suns could be conceived to blaze together in the sky, the united brilliance might approach the resplendence of the Supreme'."

Sastri often spoke to his intimate friends of the privations his parents had to endure for the sake of giving him school and college education. He was full of filial piety and reverence. His mother outlived his father. In later life, though pressed year after year to undertake a trip to England for promoting amongst the English public the cause of self-government for India, he put away his going for the sake of being with his mother at the time of her passing away and performing the obsequies as the eldest son should. Finally he took the plunge and sailed for England in 1919. Before he could reach Aden, his mother died and to the end of his life he felt a deep remorse for his misfortune in having been unable to perform the last rites of his mother.

Srinivasan was a student of the Native High School, Kumbakonam, from the infant standard to the matriculation class. Here young and impressionable Srinivasan, easily the most brilliant and devoted pupil of his school, came under the influence of an able teacher, an ardent patriot, and altogether a powerful personality—Rao Bahadur Appu Sastri, the founder and headmaster of the school. Appu Sastri carried with him the dignity of his calling and had great pride in his profession. He awakened in Srinivasan the public spirit that was to be so prominent a feature of his life and character. Sastri said of his teacher : "Appu Sastri was a very wide-awake student of contemporary affairs. He had a very liberal and progressive idea of the way he should train his young scholars. I used to be one of the most favoured of his pupils and I remember

how often he brought into the class newspapers, parliamentary records and history books and magazines in which some important event or proceeding in the legislature has been described." Sastri describes how Appu Sastri one day read to his students a stirring passage from Lal Mohan Ghose of Calcutta, a great lawyer and a graceful and polished orator in English. Those were the days when the Europeans and Anglo-Indians carried on a bitter agitation against the Ilbert Bill which sought to remove the special privilege which Europeans enjoyed of being tried in a court only by European judges. This bill so enraged the English and Anglo-Indian Community that they subjected the good Lord Ripon, the Viceroy, and the Law Member Sir Courtney Ilbert, to all sorts of indignities. At Calcutta, the Europeans and Anglo-Indians held a big public meeting at which a barrister, Branson, used these words : "This native criticism of the Englishman is verily and truly the jack-ass kicking the lion." This "Ja'-ass" pronouncement brought out a spirited reply from Lal Mohan Ghose at a very big public demonstration which he organized. This speech was read out by Appu Sastri to his class. Sastri writes : "I remember very well that as soon as this speech was printed in the papers, he brought it to his class and read it with great gusto. I was then quite young. As I heard these words I felt the blood boil within me."

Towards the end of his life. Sastri wrote of himself in a letter : "Early subdual of the passions ! As far as I can trace it, it goes back to my sixth form when Appu Sastri taught us the vast content of the word 'Gentleman' and mentioned decency, seemliness, propriety, repression of the outward show of anger or joy as one of his prominent elements." Thus, Appu Sastri's influence on Srinivasan was profound.

Srinivasan was a strong boy and spent many hours mingling in the street and river bed sports, and excelling in them. His healthy outdoor life helped to check the gloom of his inner life. In 1883, at the early age of fourteen when he was still in the matriculation class, Srinivasan was married to Parvati, who, of course, was still younger. In those days such early marriages were common. Srinivasan was one of the youths who had been prevailed upon by one of his reformist teachers to take a vow not to marry before the age of eighteen. But he had no other course, at that tender age, except to yield to the wishes of his parents.

In 1884, his fifteenth year, Srinivasan passed his matriculation examination, standing thirteenth in the Presidency. This high rank entitled him to free education in the First Year Arts Course. He joined the Government College, Kumbakonam, and in 1885 he passed his F.A. Examination standing first in rank in the entire Presidency. He won a handsome prize and a gold medal for proficiency in English. His rank again entitled him to free education in his B.A. Class. Sastri sat together in his class with K. Srinivasa Iyengar (in later life, Sir K. Srinivasa Iyengar, Law Member of the Government of Madras) and T. Jivaji Rao, who later became a District and Sessions judge. Among his teachers were eminent scholars like Professor K. Sundararama Aiyer, Professor Sadhu Seshayya, Mr. G. H. Stuart, Mr. J. Bilderbeck, Mr. Hensman and Mahamahopadyaya Rangachariar. Sastri used to recall the memory of these great and good teachers with affection and reverence. Many of them lived to see their beloved Srinivasan attain high eminence in public life and world-wide fame.

In 1887 Srinivasan had the thrilling experience of hearing Surendranath Banerjea's speech at the Indian National Congress which held its session in Madras that year. Sastri was then in his junior B.A. class and came to Madras

for his language examination. In those days, students from the mofussil had to go to Madras for their B.A. examination. He was lucky to get into the Congress session when Surendranath Banerjea delivered his speech. Recalling late in life this experience, Sastri writes: "He (Surendranath Banerjea) delivered one of his great orations. I have never heard such a speech in my life. The impression that it then made on my mind is still a vivid memory. How his sentences rolled on as he denounced them (his opponents), every word distinct, the accent perfect. The sentences rang as they came out of his mouth, the delivery slow, emphatic and marked by suitable pauses, the voice rising and falling ! Oh ! it was a splendid, splendid treat for us."*

Sastri took his B.A. degree in 1888 with a first class in English and standing first in the Presidency in that subject. Throughout his education, he received support from his elder sister's husband Viswanatha Aiyer. With his brother-in-law's encouragement he joined the Law College after graduation. But unfortunately his brother-in-law died within a few months of his joining the Law College and he had to leave it for want of financial support.

The burden of supporting a large family fell on him. Luckily for him and the family, he obtained a teacher's post in the Municipal High School, at Mayavaram (Thanjavur District) in 1888. His headmaster, Narayanaswami Aiyer, treated him with fatherly care, keeping him for some months under his own roof. Sastri loved his pupils and they loved him in return. He held that this subtle bond of affection between teacher and pupil is one of the greatest rewards of life. Among his first pupils at Mayavaram was T. R. Venkatarama Sastri, later to become a famous advocate and a staunch Liberal. Between Srinivasa Sastri

*Life and Times of Sir Pheroza Mehta-P. 34.

and Venkatarama Sastri developed a most tender friendship which lasted throughout their life. It was in Mayavaram too that his life-long devotion to Webster's Dictionary began. He pored through long hours at this Dictionary which, as his friends used to say, became his *Gita*. Thus at an early age were laid the foundations of his mastery of the English language, the nuances of its idiom, grammar and pronunciation.

After three years of a happy and care-free life as teacher in Mayavaram, Srinivasa Sastri joined the Teachers' Training College, Saidapet (Madras) in 1891. This step was opposed by his parents who loved the quiet and peaceful life in Mayavaram. His headmaster, Narayanaswami Aiyer, too, dissuaded him from leaving Mayavaram. But Sastri held it his inescapable duty to qualify himself for the calling of a teacher and rise to his full stature as an educationist. His twelve months at the Saidapet Teachers' College were spent in great happiness, Sastri being regarded by his fellow-students and teachers as the seniormost pupil-teacher. Sastri was more prominent on the platform, the stage and the playground than even in his classes. On one or two occasions, however, he made himself felt in the class room. One day, the Principal of the College Mr. A. A. Hall, in setting out to teach his students good elocution and correct pronunciation, himself mispronounced three words placing the accent wrongly on them. Srinivasan who had been actually complimented by the Principal on his own good pronunciation created a sensation in the class by pointing out his Principal's errors in pronouncing "magnificent", "formidable", "execrable". Hall claimed he had pronounced the words correctly. A dictionary was brought to the class and Hall's incorrectness was established. It is noteworthy that Hall took the incident in good part and Sastri did not have to suffer for it. On the other hand, he evoked

the good offices of Srinivasan in patching up a quarrel that he had picked up with a colleague of his, known for his independence and integrity, whom he had unwittingly undervalued.

In 1892 he returned to Mayavaram to serve as teacher in the Municipal High School. But soon he longed for a wider sphere and against the opposition of his parents and his headmaster took up appointment as the first assistant in the Municipal College, Salem in 1893. The feeling of relief and liberation which he felt on moving to a wider sphere has been described by him in a letter to his friend D. V. Gundappa :

“For several years, when I was in Mayavaram (between 1888 and 1893) I used to suffer from fits of depression like the one you describe. My feeling was that cruel circumstances had thrown me into an environment not only uncongenial but utterly beneath me. A sense of wasted opportunity hag-rode me day after day. Not till I got a transfer to Salem did I obtain any relief. And that transfer was bitterly opposed by my father and my (then) headmaster. But so clear was my conviction that it was essential for my soul that I risked their serious displeasure and fled !”

During 1893 and 1894 Srinivasa Sastri taught English in the Salem College with great distinction. It was then that he came under the influence of C. Vijayaraghavachariar, the great patriot of Salem. Curiously enough, he came under the notice of Vijayaraghavachariar when he took a line different from his while speaking on the question of holding simultaneous examinations in India for the Indian Civil Service. As examinations for the I.C.S. were then held only in England, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta and other leaders wanted the examinations to be held in India simultaneously with those held in England. But they were

willing to concede that those who passed the examinations in India should have a term of training in England before they started their career in India. Vijayaraghavachariar was against this compromise which conceded a period of training in England. Srinivasa Sastri, however, took the line of Sir Pherozeshah Mehta and, against the remonstrance of the Salem patriot, spoke out at a public meeting asking for simultaneous examinations, but with a period of training in England after passing the examination in India. The meeting carried Sastri's proposition and Vijayaraghavachariar was both surprised and impressed by Sastri's achievement. He noted him and began to cultivate him. When there was a local controversy over the displacement of a non-official chairman of the Salem Municipality by an official chairman, Vijayaraghavachariar objected to it and organised an agitation. He called upon the services of Srinivasa Sastri for drafting some newspaper articles including some editorials to *The Hindu*. Though Sastri's path in politics was divergent from Vijayaraghavachariar's, he imbibed from his senior friend the fervour of public spirit and learnt from him the A B C of politics.

Srinivasa Sastri moved out from Salem to Pachayappa's College High School, Madras, in 1895 as a teacher in English. In 1896 his wife Parvati died, leaving her son Sankaran behind in tender infancy. It was with touching remorse that Sastri wrote in a letter late in life : "Unfortunately I was not emancipated enough in 1895 to have her photographed." His second marriage with Lakshmi took place in 1897, and he began slowly to 'emancipate' himself so much that he created the impression in his family circles that he was a fond, and even an indulgent, husband!

In 1899 Sastri became the headmaster of the Hindu High School, Triplicane (Madras), and made a great name as an educationist. A strict disciplinarian within the class,

he moved with dignity and freedom with his students outside the class. He went out with them in excursion parties, leaping into the river and swimming with them, playing with them, and sharing their life in general. His years of teaching were years of the utmost happiness. He often spoke of the love with which youth leaps to youth, (for he was not much older than his students) and of the special affection which the more promising scholars extended to him and the rewards which he met with in his efforts to improve their minds. But Sastri was not content with the joy of teaching only. He sought wider contacts and he easily made them by the sheer power of his personality. It was in this period that he formed a deep and admiring friendship with one of the greatest men of his days in Madras, V. Krishnaswami Aiyer. He became an intimate friend of G. A. Natesan and Prof. K. B. Ramanathan. He was also a devout student of public questions and took part in discussions of public affairs. Speaking in 1943, Sir N. Gopalaswami Aiyengar recalled the participation of Sastri in the Triplicane Literary Society in those days : "As I stand here, my memory travels back forty years and more to the premises of the old Triplicane Literary Society and to the house then occupied by Mr. Sastri in Akbar Sahib Street, Triplicane. There, at irregular intervals, a small group of persons interested in the study of public affairs used to gather and, in an earnest endeavour to inform themselves, as fully and accurately as the meagre literature then available on such subjects permitted, proceeded to talk to and at each other with the maximum of freedom on all questions under the sun, particularly the social, economic and political problems of the day. At these gatherings, Mr. Sastri was generally receptive and reticent. His interventions in talk or debate were rare, though, when they did occur, they were purposeful and effective. I for one cannot recall

that I then detected in him indications of that skill in argument, phrasing and enunciation which later made him one of the world's great orators in the English language."

It was in this period that Sastri founded the Madras Teachers' Guild and published the *Educational Review*. He helped G. A. Natesan to found the *Indian Review*. Recalling in later years his work for the *Indian Review*, Sastri wrote : "Mr. Ramanathan and I were pledged to give our best on the literary side. In those days I had to do two men's work in the Hindu High School but, being thirty and in full vigour, I do not remember grudging the hours I devoted to Natesan's new venture. Electric lighting was then unknown. The large amount of proof-reading and other labour that fell to my share was done by the light of two candle-lamps, late at night and early in the morning. My eye had a flair for the detection of wrong spelling and wrong type, and so strong is the bias that I then caught that I cannot now read even a borrowed book without itching to decorate the margin with remarks for which every succeeding reader will curse me. No oculist ever told me, but I have always traced my premature acquisition of long sight—it came to me at 35—to the vigils of fostering which I took on myself beside the cradle of the *Review*."

There was no sphere of public life which Sastri did not touch even in those early years. He took a deep interest in the Co-operative movement and was one of the founders of the Triplicane Urban Co-operative Society, now a big organisation in Madras. He evinced interest in social reform too. He advocated post-puberty marriage. In 1906 he published a pamphlet on the subject showing that according to the Hindu *Sastras* this was the proper procedure. He kept up to his principle when later his daughter Rukmini was married. In those days such a step was almost revolutionary !

We could get some insight into the manifold activities of Srinivasa Sastri in those days from the following words of G. A. Natesan, his contemporary and close friend: "As an active member of the Teachers' Guild, as one of the founders of the Triplicane Co-operative Society—which has now assumed large dimensions—and in building up in those days the various Congress committees and infusing life into moribund clubs and institutions, Mr. Sastri has played no mean part in the public life of this Presidency. In the early days of the Ranade Institute, as a trusted friend of the late Mr. V. Krishnaswami Aiyer, its founder, Mr. Sastri took a very active interest in its growth and development."

CHAPTER II

THE MANTLE OF GOKHALE

By 1905 Srinivasa Sastri had reached the peak of his reputation as a headmaster. His health was excellent. He enjoyed the attachment of his pupils and the confidence and respect of his colleagues. He was also a respected citizen in Madras with a wide circle of intimate friends. He was a happy man in the fullness of domestic felicity. But in the middle of 1905, his contentment was upset by a small pamphlet marked "confidential" which G. A. Natesan had sent him. It was the Prospectus and Rules of the Servants of India Society. His heart was possessed by the language and sentiments no less than by the ideal set forth in it of rearing up a band of national missionaries whose sacred task would be to "spiritualise public life". Sastri writes : "Again and again I would ask myself, have I not been reaching out for something like this, though I could never have given it clear expression."* What ecstasy of fervour and faith Gokhale's words wrought on Sastri is seen from the following words which Sastri wrote in a sketch of Gokhale on the eve of the session of the Indian National Congress held at Banaras in December 1905 :—"A sacrificer of old, even when he gave up his self, had an eye to the joys of *Swarga*, and a *sanyasin*, though he renounced the world, often strove only for his salvation. From Mr. Gokhale's sacrifice and *sanyasa* all thought of self is removed. Would that more of us sacrificed ourselves on that altar ! Would that there were more of such political *sanyasins* ! All patriotic prayer is summed up in that wish."

*The Story of My Admission

Sastri attended the session of the Indian National Congress at Banaras. During the session (December 27, 1905) he wrote a letter, admirable for its unadorned sincerity and modesty, to Gokhale, applying for admission to the Servants of India Society. The important passage ran :

“I am a schoolmaster in Triplicane with about 17 years’ service. I graduated B.A. in 1888 and am now 37 years old. My age, I fear, may be against me, as I may not have many years more to give to the service of my country. Nor have I the confidence that I can do very much in the few years that lie before me. Such as I am, however, I offer myself and hope to be accepted. I don’t write this letter under an impulse of the moment; but the idea has been long in my mind, and it was for this purpose chiefly that I made up my mind to come here as delegate.”

So novel was this *political sanyasa* that many friends dissuaded him from joining the Society. Sastri writes : “I cannot remember that I received active sympathy or positive incitement from any friend. If some applauded my action, they took care not to let me know of it.”

Like his master Gokhale, Srinivasa Sastri gave up teaching to devote himself to public life. Sastri was as grief-stricken to bid farewell to his students and colleagues of the Hindu High School, Triplicane, Madras, as Gokhale was when he left the Fergusson College, Poona, to found the Servants of India Society. He was moved as he had never before been, and for a moment he doubted the wisdom of forsaking the pupils and colleagues whose love was so deep and unaffected. But the die was cast and he followed his destiny. In his farewell speech, he said that his only shield was his faith in the righteousness of his cause. He quoted the famous verse from Valmiki in which Kausalya

pronounces a parting benediction on her son when he leaves for the forest :—

*"Yam pālayasi dharmam tvam dhrityā cha
niyamena cha*

*Sa vai Rāghava sārḍūla dharma stvam abhirak-
shatu."*

(Let *dharma* keep thee from harm, the same *dharma* that thou followest with such steadfastness and self-denial.)

This passage was a favourite one with Sastri and he derived endless solace from it. He writes :—

"Many are the occasions since then on which I have invoked this sloka for the comfort of my soul. When the world fails and doubt lays siege to the heart, there is nothing for it but to fall back on your conscience, if you have been true to it."*

At the bidding of Gokhale, Sastri attended the Congress session in Calcutta in December, 1906 over which Dadabhai Naoroji presided. It was his third term as the Congress president. Sastri had the good fortune of being presented by Gokhale to Dadabhai along with other members of the Society. This was immediately after the close of the Congress, but it was not till the 15th of January, 1907 that Sastri was actually admitted. Recalling the impressive occasion Sastri writes : "The place was the upper storey of a house in Rowland Road, Ballygunge, and the time, early morning. I had been enjoined to bathe and not to break my fast till the ceremony was over. I remember being in a highly chastened mood, although there had been no vigil or prayer the preceding night. Gokhale's deportment was solemn and inspired me with something like awe. As I pronounced the phrases of each vow after him,

*The Story of My Admission

I was seized with terrible misgiving as to my being able to keep them in a tolerable degree."

The very next day after his admission to the Society, Sastri started on his travels in East Bengal which was then only beginning to recover from the effects of the first partition agitation. To his untravelled heart the varied charms of Bengal, Assam and Manipur were no less fascinating than the personalities of the political figures of that day. He was particularly impressed by the sweet and attractive personality of Asvini Kumar Dutt who was called the "King of Barisal". For five years, in accordance with the rules of the Society, Sastri made incessant tours, studied and prepared himself for public work under the guidance of his master Gokhale. But even during these five years Gokhale treated him already as an experienced colleague, and relaxed in his case the interdict on speaking and writing that was being enforced on every member of the Society for five years.

In 1907 Sastri attended the Surat Congress and was an eye-witness to what is known as 'the Surat split' between the extremists led by Lokamanya Tilak, B.C. Pal and Arabindo Ghosh, and the moderates led by Mehta, Rashbihari Ghosh and Gokhale. A heavy Mahratta shoe, the sole studded with lead, was aimed at Sir Pherozeshah Mehta. It just touched Banerjea and struck Sir Pherozeshah Mehta in the chin. Confusion prevailed and the Congress dissolved in chaos. Sastri has described how he rushed to the platform to protect the great men who were on it from the flying chairs, when he saw a young fellow taking a chair and was about to strike him. He looked up and met one of his own old pupils of Hindu High School, who, as soon as he saw that it was Sastri, forbore from violence saying in Tamil "Is that you, Sir?" Sastri has also described the manner in

which Gokhale threw his hands around Tilak forbidding the volunteers from removing him bodily from the platform.

Sastri has often described Gokhale's great admiration for his redoubtable political opponent Tilak, and his gentleness in controversy with him and the tenderness of his heart, always longing for reconciliation. Sastri himself had an unconcealed admiration for Tilak. Sastri was in Bombay during the last three days of the famous trial of Tilak (1907) and heard with a grief that was crushing, Justice Davar bite out his sentence of deportation in a slow solemn tone amidst death-like silence. In a letter of the period Sastri wrote : "I needn't say that Poona lies prostrate under the blow, which is felt in every home. The one thought of every one is the great gap left in the ranks of public men." Sastri had an abundant measure of the extremist fire in him of which Gokhale used to warn him. In a letter of 1907, Sastri made a prophetic forecast that "succeeding generations will contribute more character, virility, and persistence to the (extremist) party", and added, "impartial history will perhaps record that every onward step in our liberation was rendered possible by their seeming recklessness and bravado." Indeed, a study of the political evolution of many of our great leaders will show that there is some truth in the dictum that the extremist is a moderate in a hurry. Sastri himself was an extremist who held his fire in bondage. It is interesting to note that in those days the members of the Servants of India Society were under espionage and that Sastri received a very special attention from the C.I.D.

The next day after the break-up of the Congress in Surat, some of the moderate leaders met at Pherozeshah's camp. It was V. Krishnaswami Aiyer who mooted the idea of a convention of delegates whose loyalty to the established ideals of the Congress could be relied upon. He

drew up a notice calling a convention of those delegates who were agreed on :—

1. "That the attainment by India of Self-Government similar to that enjoyed by the Self-Governing members of the British Empire and participation by her in the rights and responsibilities of the Empire on equal terms with those members is the goal of our political aspirations.

2. "That the advance towards this goal is to be by strictly constitutional means, by bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration and by promoting National Unity, fostering public spirit and improving the condition of the mass of the people."

The creed stated above is very important in the history of the Congress, because for many years it remained the basis of its constitution. The Convention approved of this creed, and also appointed a Convention Committee which met in Allahabad in April 1908 and decided that those who expressly accepted this creed in writing and agreed to abide by the rules of the Congress should alone be accepted as delegates. The Madras Congress of 1908 was held under the Convention Committee's Constitution.

The brunt of the organisation of this Conference fell on the broad shoulders of V. Krishnaswami Aiyer for whom Sastri had unbounded admiration. Sastri stood by Krishnaswami Aiyer and did all he could to help him. C. Y. Chintamani and Sastri went about touring the province enrolling people into Congress Committees. It was no easy task and he had the greatest difficulty in Salem where Vijayaraghavachariar and C. Rajagopalachari, then a rising member of the Bar, were against the holding of the Congress on the lines chalked out by the Convention. The Congress met in Madras against odds and Sastri did hard work as

captain of the volunteers and secretary of the reception committee.

Sastri's interest in education continued to be active even after his joining the Servants of India Society. He undertook tours in many districts in the South, gathering support in favour of Gokhale's Elementary Education Bill which sought to bring about by stages compulsory elementary education for every child in the country—alas ! an ideal that has still not been attained. In 1910 Sastri was elected a fellow of the Madras University by the registered graduates and continued as such till 1920.

In January 1913 he was nominated to the Legislative Council. Even under the severe limitations, in the Legislative Council, which was more like a debating forum than a legislative body, Sastri achieved distinction and made himself felt. Thorough in the study of public affairs, his questions were pointed, his resolutions purposeful and his speeches models of eloquence and perspicacity. Education, he made his own subject. He constantly pleaded for the expansion of elementary education and stressed that Government policies should not be efficiency vs. expansion, but efficiency *cum* expansion. He succeeded in getting the Government to abandon a costly scheme of Model Schools, which, in his judgment, would not bring much benefit.

A reference in one of his speeches to a difference of opinion between him and his wife regarding the medium of instruction in the Triplicane Girls' High School is interesting. Sastri was for Tamil, his wife for English ! He told the Legislative Council : "My wife told me : 'I hear you are going to disturb the system of education in the Triplicane School. Why not our girls learn English as they are doing now, as that seems all right?'". The Council rejected Sastri's view. In the ~~24th~~ 24th of debate, Sastri went even so far as to say, "One day people must realise



that English cannot be spoken in this country." He took care, however, to moderate his views on another occasion and say, "English must of course occupy a most prominent place in the curricula of schools and colleges, for it would be an evil day indeed for India if her doors ceased to be flung wide open to the glories and shining influence of English literature, rich in noble ideas and glowing with inspiration to noble deeds."

He was always vigilant in the fight for the rights of teachers and demanded increased salaries for them. He strongly objected to fining low paid teachers.

Sastri took also a deep interest in the promotion of the co-operative movement and the effective functioning of municipalities and village panchayats. His central aim in all his discussions was to enhance the influence of non-official opinion at all levels of administration. He rejected the pessimistic view that the discussions of the Legislative Council were altogether wasted labour. He said : "I am free to confess that a great deal of good has resulted even from our work. Suggestions, apparently rejected, have however, gone home and borne fruit—not capturing the Council directly, but otherwise. Questions answered rather curtly in the Council, have however, been taken up and upon investigation have led to the remedies desired. On the whole, I am glad to acknowledge, Your Excellency, that in this Council the general atmosphere is one of cordial respect and goodwill." The brilliant impression he made as a legislator can be gathered from the following words of Mr. H. M. Corbett, sometime Advocate General of Madras :

"In Mr. Sastri we have a legislator of whom anybody may well be proud. Nothing has given me greater pleasure in the Council than to see him arguing the cause he loved with eloquence, courage and

persistence, and with a ready smile when defeated, which marks him out as a 'born legislator'.

On February 19, 1915 Gokhale passed away, plunging the country in grief and leaving the Servants of India Society fatherless and leaderless. When in his last days, Dr. Deva asked Gokhale as to whom he would nominate for his successor, he refused to mention any name. The members of the Society unanimously elected Sastri as its President. The impression, however, gained ground that Gokhale himself nominated Sastri, and C. F. Andrews always referred to him as "Gokhale's own chosen successor".

Soon after Sastri's election as President, the Society had to face a severe trial. Gandhi for whom Gokhale had the greatest veneration was naturally thought of by Gokhale as a prospective member of the Society. However, he had certain reservations about Gandhi's extreme views and he prescribed for him a year's study tour of all India, hoping that through an intimate knowledge of the realities of the Indian scene, his views would be softened and modified. Unfortunately, Gokhale died all too soon and a few months after, Gandhi came to confer with the members of the Society. There was a most intimate and searching talk on both sides. Sastri has described the scene*: "I still remember vividly where he sat, a little aloof from the rest of us, and how he talked to us in rasping tones, condemning our lives, giving us no credit whatever for making any sacrifice to join the Society, and telling us in as sharp a language as human vocabulary could find: 'You pride yourselves on being Servants of India. You don't go amongst the poor Harijans and labourers. I wonder what you do, you who live this sort of life here. You don't eat their food. You don't suffer their sufferings. And what good is it? and so he went on, piling misery upon misery until

*Pages 171-72—"Life and Times of Pherozesha Mehta"

our poor fellows lost colour completely and felt themselves thoroughly humiliated. Many of them sat speechless with despair." Sastri felt he had to stand up for his young men and he spoke to the critic in as gentle a tone as he could assume : "Please be merciful. It is only two or three years ago that you began to travel third class. We may learn still. We promise to learn. Just be merciful." Gandhi felt he had gone a little too far. He said "I was perhaps somewhat unsparing in my criticism. I should not have been so harsh as to discredit you all. I am sorry." Sastri's own inclination in the matter was guided by Gokhale's reverence for Gandhi which he shared fully with him. He was prepared for the admission of Gandhi to the Society and to take cheerfully whatever consequences might come out of that step. The year of Gandhi's apprenticeship was about to be over and the question of his admission to the Society had to be faced. To put it in Sastri's own words : "Anxious were our consultations at the time. We saw deep differences between him and us and felt, though none of us could have given clear expression to it, that his political evolution would take him farther from us. Still our hearts trembled as well as grieved when we told him that it was best for both of us to remain apart and pursue our several courses". Gandhi took the decision with characteristic nobility and generosity and wrote to Sastri : "The members are coming to a just decision in not having me as a member. Whilst there is possibility of co-operation when we are working independently, I can see that I would, as a member, become a disturbing factor. The methods of the Society as such are so totally different from mine in many respects. Our common discipleship would constitute an indissoluble bond though we would be following out Mr. Gokhale's work from different view-points." To save the Society from the awkward step of formal rejection Gandhi

withdrew his application. Writing in his "Experiments With Truth", he says "the withdrawal of my application made me truly a member of the Society."

Later, in 1946, in the course of his Foreword to the present author's collection of Sastri's writings and speeches on Gokhale, Gandhi wrote : "However strange my claim may appear to the reader, I have called Gokhale my political Guru. Therefore, Sastriar is a fellow disciple. And what a disciple and yet an amiable usurper!!! I was to have the honour of being Gokhale's successor but I found in Sastriar a worthy usurper to whom I made a willing surrender. I could have given no satisfaction to the few well chosen members of the Society. I had and have no gifts which Gokhale had and Sastriar has in luxurious abundance."

One of the first tasks which Sastri set to himself as successor to Gokhale was the healing of the split between the extremists and the moderates and bringing them once again on the same Congress platform. This reunion was one of Gokhale's deepest longings in his last years. But Pherozeshah Mehta's firm attitude against bringing back the extremists into the Congress fold stood in the way of reconciliation. With the passing away of Mehta in 1915, negotiations for reconciliation were renewed and Sastri took an active, though, as was characteristic with him, unobtrusive part in these negotiations. The years 1915, 1916, 1917 and 1918 marked the high watermark of our national life. Jinnah himself played the role of an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity and Tilak fraternised with the moderates. The nation spoke with one voice. It was in this heyday of Indian politics that Sastri wrote the pamphlet "*Self-Government for India under the British Flag*" (1916), declaring in no uncertain terms that "the Indian people cannot be reconciled to the continuance of British connec-

tion unless their country, the greatest dependency of England, the brightest jewel in her diadem, be elevated to the status and privilege of a self-governing Dominion."

It was in this period too that 'nineteen elected members of the Indian Legislative Council including Sastri, presented a Memorandum to the Government of India, demanding self-government for India on a par with the Dominions. This document, full of constructive proposals, known as the *Memorandum of the Nineteen*, was followed by the *Congress-League Scheme* in the shaping of which Sastri had a leading part. Both the Congress and the Muslim League approved of this scheme during their annual sessions at Lucknow in 1916. One feature of what came to be known as the "Lucknow Pact" is worthy of note. Separate electorates for Muslims were to continue on a wider and more liberal basis than under the Morley-Minto Reforms. Gokhale had accepted communal electorates in 1906. Sastri accepted it in 1916, and so did Tilak, Surendranath Banerjea and other leaders. They had, however, hoped that communal electorates would only be a temporary expedient which could give place soon to a more satisfying solution. Sastri wrote an exposition of the Congress-League Scheme and spoke at many platforms in various parts of the country expounding the Scheme. In May, 1917, Sastri presided over the Bombay Provincial Congress held at Nasik. Tilak among others attended the Conference. In his "*Story of My Life*", Jayakar refers to the great impression which Sastri's address made. Sastri gave expression to the pride and joy that then filled the political atmosphere, charged with national unity and constructive patriotism. The mantle of Gokhale had fallen on Sastri and he soon won for himself a standing worthy of Gokhale's successor.

CHAPTER III

THE INDIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

IN July 1916, Srinivasa Sastri was returned to the Indian Legislative Council by the Madras Legislative Council. He defeated Dr. T. M. Nair and C. Vijayaraghavachariar of Salem, stalwarts in public life. Sastri joined the galaxy of great personalities in the Council—Madan Mohan Malaviya, Chimanlal Setalvad, Bhupendranath Basu, D. E. Wacha, Ibrahim Rahimtoolah, M. A. Jinnah, T. B. Sapru, B. N. Sharma and others. He soon won respect from officials and non-officials alike by the thoroughness of his preparation, the skill of his presentation and, above all, the remarkable combination in him of the patriotic fervour with the sweet reasonableness of moderation. And his great eloquence shone even in that august Council where eloquence was not uncommon.

While giving evidence before the Royal Commission on Public Services in India in 1914, Sastri had urged with all the emphasis he could command that there should be a rapid Indianisation of the services in all government departments. In the Indian Legislative Council he made this subject his first concern. He moved a series of resolutions regarding recruitment to the services in various departments—the Public Works, the Railways, Post and Telegraphs, Education, Police and Medical Service. He vigorously opposed the racial discrimination in the Services and asked that they should take every care to bring into competition with the best Indian talent the best European talent. On one occasion he crossed swords with the Commander-in-chief when he accused the Military Department of “extraordinary inertia”, and displayed his courage and brilliance in debate when he told the irate

Commander-in-chief : "I wish to add for the information of the Commander-in-chief that, if he has never heard before of the inertia of the Military Department he has not heard of something which everybody else has heard of and known."

When the question of the reorganisation of provinces in the British India on linguistic basis came up in the Legislative Council in 1918, he opposed such a reorganisation. For, he feared that this would lead to parochial patriotism and fissiparous tendencies. Speaking on the budget for 1918-19 Sastri pointed out that it was the poor man that had to bear the whole weight of the costly administration. Speaking of the poor man's burdens by way of taxation he quoted Shakespere :

*"Which have of late so huddled on his back,
Enow to press a royal merdhan^t down,
and pluck commisseration of his state
From brassy bosome and tough hearts of flint."*

Towards the end of 1917 the Government of India appointed the Sedition Committee presided over by Justice Rowlatt of England to enquire into the alleged sedition movement in India and make recommendations to deal with it. The Committee's infamous recommendations were drastic beyond imagination. The country was agitated in an unprecedented measure. The Government of India, heedless of the feelings of the people, introduced two Bills based on the recommendations of the Rowlatt report, the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Bill and the Criminal Law (Emergency Powers) Bill in February 1919. All the non-official members, nominated as well as elected, opposed them. On February 7, 1919 Sastri made his historic speech on the Rowlatt Bills which created a profound impression at the time and became an abiding

memory with all those who listened to it. Mahatma Gandhi writes in his Autobiography :

"I have attended the proceedings of India's Legislative chamber only once in my life, and that was on the occasion of the debate on this (Rowlatt) Bill. Shastriji delivered an impassioned speech, in which he uttered a solemn note of warning to the Government. The Viceroy seemed to be listening spell-bound, his eyes riveted on Shastriji as the latter poured forth the hot stream of his eloquence. For the moment it seemed to me as if the Viceroy could not but be deeply moved by it, it was so true and so full of feeling."

It was an impassioned Sastri who spoke out of a lacerated heart. One passage became specially famous :

"We have been subjected to many tests. We have given our consent to many repressive laws by now, like the Press Act and the Defence of India Act. During the War we were hourly on our trial. We have given 100 millions. We have given this, we have given that. The other day we were told that the gift of 45 millions would also be a matter of test. We submitted to it. What test has been really applied to us to which we have not cheerfully submitted? I can hardly think of one. Bidden to bring the milk of a beast of prey we have brought a jugful of milk of the tigress. Are you going to throw it aside and say 'Bring the milk of the male tiger'?"

When, in spite of his plea, the Bill was about to be finally passed on March 18, 1919, Sastri spoke solemn words of anguish and warning. Indeed, these were words of grim foreboding :

"In a few minutes more this Bill will be law and when the Bill is law it does not remain there; we

have still the aftermath, the consequences of the law to the Government of India no less than to us. For, as the poet once said in a tragic connection, 'if it were done when it is done, then it were well it was done quickly'. I will not go further with this awesome passage; but the darkened page is there, and unfortunately, although some of us have tried to dissuade him from the course, Mr. Gandhi has taken it up. Well, I know how he will play his part; his character* will be bold, blameless, perfectly white. I could wish. Your Excellency, although I trust but faintly, that those of us who have also to write on this darkened page, his followers, the Government and the Government Employees, we political agitators and detenus, that we could all say at the end of the business that we also wrote perfectly white."

The Rowlatt Act was "the unblest mother of a monstrous brood of evils", culminating in the massacre in the Jallianwala Bagh, with its fateful consequences to the politics of the country. When the Punjab tragedy overtook the country, a European member of the Indian Legislative Council told Sastri that his awful prognostication had come true. Writing in 1924 to Mrs. Besant, Sastri remarked: "this Rowlatt Act is really the origin of most of our political troubles today."

Sastri was naturally as unhappy and indignant over the Punjab Tragedy as anyone else. When the Hunter Committee, which was appointed in 1919 to investigate into the Punjab happenings and disturbances in Bombay and Delhi, produced a majority report by the European members and a minority report by the Indian members, Sastri wrote to Sir Chimanlal Setalvad expressing his appreciation of the ability, courage and patriotism of the

*Character-writing (archaic)

minority report. The strength of his feeling over the Punjab Tragedy will be revealed by the following passage from an article of his in *The Servant of India* :

“If the victims of Jallianwala Bagh had not been Indian but English or even Irish, we should have heard a little less of ‘the moral effect of a ‘massacre’ or General Dyer’s honesty of purpose or unflinching adherence to his own conception of duty..... In honest English the moral effect desired by General Dyer was a feeling of abject terror and racial defencelessness, and his conception of duty was jingoism of the most unredeemed type To consider infamy of this nature sufficiently punished by removal (of General Dyer) from the Indian command—the command elsewhere being open—is to mock justice, outrage Indian sentiment, and condone brutality if practised on coloured people for the glorification of the British race.”

Sastri desired that the Indian Legislative Council should discuss the Hunter Committee Report and gave notice of a resolution on the subject. It was disallowed by the Viceroy who, however, did Sastri the exceptional courtesy of making a statement, explaining and defending his action before disallowing the motion. In the course of his statement the Viceroy said :

“The Resolution itself was a legitimate one, and when I say that it was Mr. Sastri who wished to move it, you will understand that I was prompted by a genuine feeling and sincerity of purpose. I felt, however, that if peace and goodwill are at any time to be restored to the Punjab, these public discussions of the happenings of last year must as far as possible be brought to an end.”

Sastri however was not pacified by the Viceroy's explanation. He practised a little dose of non-co-operation by refusing to move his other resolutions and walked out of the Council in protest !

CHAPTER IV

SASTRI AND THE MONTFORD REFORMS

SSRINIVASA Sastri recognised in Montagu a true friend of India as early as 1912 when the latter, as Under Secretary of State for India, made his speech at Cambridge in favour of Provincial Autonomy for India. As Secretary of State, Montagu made on August 20, 1917 the following declaration in the House of Commons :—

“The policy of His Majesty’s Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of Responsible Government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. They have decided that substantial steps should be taken in this direction as soon as possible.”

Unfortunately, reform and repression went side by side and the Rowlatt Committee was announced about the same time as the pronouncement of Montagu on the reforms. The atmosphere was by no means favourable to the reception of Montagu’s proposals. It was in the midst of this agitated atmosphere that Montagu came to India towards the end of 1917 with a view to ascertain the views of Indian political leaders on the reforms as well as to confer with the Viceroy and his colleagues. Sastri met Montagu several times during his tour in India and Montague has recorded in his Diary his impressions of Sastri. He noted on December 20, 1917 :

“I at last met Srinivasa Sastri, Gokhale’s successor as Servant of India, and a thoroughly sound man. He argued in favour of the Congress-Muslim

League Scheme, but finally said he would accept any scheme which fulfilled four conditions:

1. There must be elements of progress and a guarantee of progress in the scheme itself.
2. The step must be substantial and not hedged round. There must be no humiliating stipulations as to fitness.
3. India should have fiscal liberty. I said that the principle must be settled by an Imperial Conference.
4. Absolute equality between races.

I am quite sure he is on right lines.....I am quite sure, also that the Government must issue a public declaration to the (Provincial) Governments that they must work the Scheme and that civil servants must not obstruct. Chelmsford and the Government of India want to do as little as they need. I think it is absolutely essential that they should do as much as they can. Grudging giving has always been the bane of Indian administration. I am going to tell Chelmsford so."

In another entry on the same day Montagu noted that he had a long talk again with Sastri "who is going to be most helpful". Montagu listened to the debate in the Indian Legislative Council on February 9, 1918 when Sastri opposed a resolution in favour of linguistic provinces. Montagu recorded in his Diary, "I think the really good speech of the day was from Sastri, well delivered, well phrased and very impressive, urging the rejection of the motion."

Though Sastri considered the Congress-League Scheme superior to Montagu's, he was prepared to accept the proposals of the Secretary of State and to seek for their improvement. For, he saw clearly that such acceptance was constructive statesmanship. In the beginning Tilak

and Besant were against the proposals, while Gandhi and Jinnah took a sympathetic view of them. The special session of the Indian National Congress held in August 1918 in Bombay characterised the proposals as "unsatisfactory and disappointing". Though Sastri had abstained from the special session, he attended the annual session of the Congress held in Delhi in December that year. He urged that the words 'disappointing and unsatisfactory' be omitted from the text of the resolution. He did not also wish to fix any time limit for the attainment of full responsible government. Sastri had joined the National Liberal Federation of India, formed on November 1, 1918 but it was not easy for him to part from the Congress. He made one last trial to convert the Congress to his view by attending it even after he had become one of the founders of the National Liberal Federation.

On February 19, 1918, the third anniversary of Gokhale's death, Sastri founded the *Servant of India*, an organ of the Servants of India Society, "meant to advance the causes which it cherishes, disseminate its principles, and apply these to the interpretation of current affairs." In the inaugural article, Sastri defined the main aim of the paper as "an attempt to preserve the identity of Mr. Gokhale's teachings and draw guidance from them in the perplexities of public life". The conductors of the paper were "to emulate in their humble way, the fine poise, the dignity and the moral earnestness that invariably distinguished all that their master said and did." Sastri's editorials and articles in the *Servant of India* established his name not only as the exponent of a great tradition in public affairs, but as a master of the music of the written word as well as of the symphony of the spoken utterance.

After the Joint Report of Montagu and Lord Chelmsford was published in June 1918, the Secretary of State

appointed two committees : (1) to recommend what subjects should be 'transferred' to the elected ministers and what should be 'reserved' to the Governor and his Executive Council, (2) to recommend the franchise to be adopted for elections to the provincial and central legislatures. Sastri was appointed to the Franchise Committee, and he had the honour of serving in this Committee along with Surendranath Banerjea, among others, under the chairmanship of Lord Southborough. Southborough was a fair-minded man of high ability and had a deep sympathy for the Indian cause. The Franchise Committee did good work and arrived at a concordance on a difficult subject beset with controversy and passion. Lord Southborough had great affection and admiration for Sastri. In a letter of 1930, he urged Sastri to "write a short history of *our* commission—after all we did good pioneer work and the consensus of the opinion will never again be obtained."

A deputation of Indian Liberals sailed from Bombay on April 28, 1919 with a view to influence English opinion in favour of Indian reforms and to get improvements in the Montagu Reforms. Sastri was a member of it. It was his first visit abroad and he was already 50. The maturity and moderation of his outlook and his mastery of exposition were great assets for the Indian cause. Sastri was full of energy, meeting important persons and addressing several meetings, supporting the Montagu Bill but asking for its improvement. Sastri, however, noted with regret that Englishmen in general were hardly alive to the Indian question. In a letter of June 5, 1919 he writes :

"India and her trouble vex only a very few persons. It is amusing how an Englishman tells you of his countrymen's complete ignorance of India with almost the pride that attaches to a confession of an amiable weakness."

Sastri made a deep impression on all those who heard him. Sir Michael Sadler of Leeds University wrote in a private letter :

“I have no hesitation in saying that his addresses have won respectful and cordial sympathy and support of the leading citizens—men and women. But far more than his spoken words, his personality has charmed and impressed those who have had the privilege of meeting him. And they are many and (in these parts) influential.”

Sastri's evidence before the Joint Select Committee of the British Parliament on Indian Constitutional Reforms on August 15, 1919 created a great impression and was described as “characterised by phenomenal mastery, independence, outspokenness, and dignity.” C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer who was in London as a Member of Mrs. Besant's Deputation wrote : “There is not a name that stands higher in England today than that of V. S. Srinivasa Sastri.” Mr. H. S. L. Polak wrote to the *Leader* of Allahabad :

“It is no exaggeration to say that no member of any Deputation has done so much as he to give the Bill its present shape. In many respects, he has shown that he is a worthy successor to his great leader Mr. Gokhale. In this matter, too, Mr. Gokhale's mantle seems to have fallen on his shoulders and he has worn that majestic garment with an ease that would have delighted his master. India has cause to feel proud of Mr. Sastri.”

Sastri returned to India towards the end of 1919, satisfied that the Bill, with significant modifications, would soon become an Act.

What Gokhale was to Morley, Sastri was to Montagu. Gokhale strove with Morley to improve the substance of

the Reforms he proposed and at the same time understood his difficulties and gave him his full sympathy. Sastri did a similar service for Montagu and his Reforms. When Montagu was drafting his Bill, the editor of the *Spectator* asked him what Indian public man he regarded as the ablest and most effective co-operator with Britain. 'Sastri' he replied without a moment's hesitation. When the Reform proposals were under consideration, Sastri examined them with a critical eye and pointed out its defects and succeeded in getting many improvements. Under the Reforms Act of 1919, the Central Legislature was made bicameral—with the Council of State and the Legislative Assembly, each of which had elected majorities, though they also contained an official bloc. The Viceroy was given the power of certifying any legislation which he might feel was called for even though the legislatures did not pass it. Though the autocracy of the Central Government remained, the legislatures received additional powers to criticise the Government and to influence it. The Provinces had their legislative councils elected on a wider franchise. The executive was divided into two groups under the system known as Dyarchy which Sastri first opposed and later accepted most reluctantly, only after it had been considerably modified by the report of the Joint Select Committee. According to this system, the 'reserved' subjects—including finance and law and order—remained under the control of the Governor and his Councillors, while the 'transferred' subjects were under the control of Ministers who were responsible to the Legislature.

While Sastri recognised the limitations of the Montford Reforms, he also saw that a great future and bright era could dawn upon India if politicians of the right type, purged of everything that was mean, petty and parochial and determined to use all that was best in them for the

general welfare, contested the elections and captured the Government and worked the Reforms for the good of the people.

The Montagu Bill became an Act in the last week of December 1919 and simultaneously a Royal Proclamation was made and an amnesty was granted to political prisoners. The Royal Proclamation was marked by such goodwill and earnestness of purpose that Tilak who was on his way, along with members of his party, in a special train to attend the Amritsar Congress, cabled to his Majesty the grateful and loyal thanks of the Home Rule League. At the Amritsar Congress, Gandhi insisted on passing a resolution of thanks to Montagu and urged that the Reforms be sincerely worked for the betterment of the government of the country. Jinnah seconded the resolution. Though some amendments had to be accepted to meet the views especially of C. R. Das and Bipin Chandra Pal, it is noteworthy that all—including Tilak who took a most constructive attitude to the Reforms—wanted that the Reforms should be used to the best advantage to secure full Responsible Government at an early date. How rapidly the tide of events turned will be seen from the fact that within a year of the Amritsar Congress Gandhi had to launch the programme of Non-co-operation !

CHAPTER V

SASTRI'S ATTITUDE TO NON-CO-OPERATION

As early as 1909 Gokhale said in a public tribute to Mahatma Gandhi at the Lahore Congress : "He is a man well described as a man among men, a hero among heroes, a patriot among patriots, and we may well say that in him Indian humanity, at the present time, has really reached its highest watermark." Gandhi was radically different from all the other leaders of the day. The rapidity with which he threw himself heart and soul into the movements for liberating the lowly and the distressed from their suffering soon became a galvanising force. The Champaran Satyagraha and the Kheda Satyagraha brought into public view his astonishing ability to identify himself with the struggles of the toiling masses and he easily established a sway over men and commanded the loyalty of multitudes. The nationwide *hartal* which he organised on 6th April, 1919 as a protest against the Rowlatt Act was an unprecedented success. Nevertheless Gandhi was still in a mood of conciliation and co-operation. At the Amritsar Congress he actually thanked Montagu, but alas! the Report of the Hunter Committee in which its European members had practically condoned General Dyer's action and almost applauded it, infuriated the leaders of India. Gandhi's passionate sense of justice was outraged. At the same time, the dismemberment of Turkey at the end of the World War I in violation of the pledge given by the Prime Minister of Great Britain angered the Muslims in India who held the Sultan of Turkey in veneration as the Khalif. When Gandhi launched his movement of Non-co-operation the Indian

Khilafat Committee led by the Ali Brothers decided to join the movement.

At its Nagpur session which was held in December 1920 the Congress resolved to reject the Montagu Reforms and the elections under them. Sastri opposed Non-co-operation with all the strength of his conviction. He came in for a great deal of popular disfavour and he had to face opposition and disturbances at the meetings which he addressed. Extremely sensitive by nature he suffered inwardly. It fell to his lot to stick to unpopular views and to oppose the mighty Mahatma—one whom he verily regarded as “one of those rare souls who are born from time to time, all too rarely, to redeem mankind from their sin and suffering.” Sastri viewed with dread the awful consequences which he foresaw as a result of non-co-operation with the Government and the wrecking of the Reforms. He feared also that though Mahatma Gandhi undoubtedly would do everything in his power to keep the movement non-violent, it would get out of his hands and take on a violent turn. He was filled with grim forebodings. “A generation’s hopes will be frustrated; unrest and repression, acting and reacting on each other, will reduce the country to a sad plight.” He wrote in agony: “We shall hopelessly thicken the problems of our children because we choose to neglect a comparatively easy solution in our time.”

How did Sastri come to be the stoutest and the most consistent opponent of Gandhiji’s politics? The answer is to be sought in Sastri’s political philosophy and in the courage with which he stuck to the integrity of his judgment in the face of overwhelming odds. As in the case of Burke, of whom curiously enough Srinivasa Sastri was no great student, the central fact about his political outlook was his love of order and dread of anarchy. What Lord Rosebury said of Burke may well be said of Sastri : “He

loved reform because he hated revolution. He hated revolution because he loved reform." To the end he maintained his faith in constitutional agitation. "Gandhi's contemporaries," he wrote, "be they ever so puny, have a duty to the country as well as he. They may not see clearly. They may not judge rightly. But as they see and judge, they must act. If they believe that in the search of highly problematical good he is bringing highly probable evil on their common motherland, they are bound to oppose him all they can. It is a comfort to know that he at least will not blame them."

Mahatma Gandhi handled national affairs with the calculated daring of a large-scale experimenter with Truth. But Srinivasa Sastri, anxious for the conservation of society and its slow, steady and sure improvement, displayed a certain timidity which, in that large and imperfectly understood sphere, he insisted, was only an honourable form of courage. Sastri distinguished between the nature of the affairs of an individual and that of the affairs of a nation. A man may act fearlessly in his own affairs, not minding the consequences. But when he deals with the affairs of his country *i.e.* with the interests and feelings of a large mass of people, he must act with fear of consequences. Timidity is appropriate in the conduct of national affairs, for it is only concern for society. At the end of his *Kamala Lectures* on the Rights and Duties of the Indian Citizen¹ (1926), Sastri observed: "I fear that our best men have failed in their duty in the presence of the revolutionary and anarchical forces now afoot in our country. If we destroy the present fabric which is by no means perfect, but which is capable of continual adaptation to better, finer issues, if we once destroy this jurisprudence for the understanding and practical elucidation of which our intellects seem to be so mightily fitted—if once we

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destroy this fabric, shall we out of our own traditional aptitudes erect a similar fabric on the ruin? I dare not promise myself that, and that is why I hesitated and will hesitate again and again before I join any movement, which has the tendency to overthrow, the tendency to disestablish, the tendency to bring about a state of anarchy in the country, the tendency which destroys law, the tendency, therefore, which destroys order and ordered Government."

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW COUNCIL OF STATE

Srinivasa Sastri was elected to the Council of State formed under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reform.

The Duke of Connaught inaugurated the Joint Session of the new Council of State and the Indian Legislative Assembly on February 9, 1921. Some passages in the aged and venerable Duke's speech on the occasion touched Sastri by their passionate sincerity and noble sentiments. When the Council of State met for the first time on February 14, 1921, Sastri made a feelingful reference to the Duke of Connaught's speech in the following terms :—

"I was not struck by any part of His Royal Highness's speech, great as it was, so much as by the passage in which he summed up in simple but pregnant words the experience of humanity in its struggle for freedom. The words are worth quoting, and I will make no apology to the Council for doing so :—

'Political freedom has often been won by revolution, by tumult, by civil war, at the price of peace and public safety. How rarely has it been the free gift of one people to another in response to a growing wish for greater liberty and to a growing evidence of fitness for its enjoyment?'.....

"...Often it has been doubted, and it has been thrown at the face of political agitators—'Are you going to beat the record of humanity? Where is the people that has won its liberty except by bloodshed?' That may or may not be, but we, England and India together, have resolved, if only we understand the genius of the Constitution of Great Britain, to achieve this unique

feat in political growth. We will achieve freedom, and the whole of it, by entirely peaceful means. Let that be the resolution of each one of us in proceeding with the work that opens to-day."

Even on the first day of its sitting, Sastri moved in the Council of State a resolution urging the appointment of a Committee for the repeal of repressive laws. For, he considered the repeal of these laws as the indispensable first step in healing the wounds of spirit which the nation had grievously suffered and to bring about reconciliation between the Government and the people of India on which the Duke had laid such great emphasis. He moved the resolution in the following words :

"The Council recommends to the Governor General in Council that a Committee be appointed at an early date to examine the repressive laws now on the Statute-book and report whether all or any of them should be repealed, and, in cases where repeal is not desirable, whether the laws in question should be amended and, if so, how."

Sastri divided the repressive laws broadly into three classes. "The first class is an offence in itself. Its presence on the Statute-book is a political danger and cannot be tolerated hereafter. To this class belongs the notorious Rowlatt Act, 'the unblest mother of a monstrous brood of evils'. Her we no longer wish to have on the Statute-book." To the second, belonged the deportation regulations of a very early date, the existence of which contributed a great deal to the growing dissatisfaction. These old-fashioned regulations, Sastri called, "a relic of a somewhat barbarous time", and demanded that they should be abolished at once. He also urged that the Press Act which had been the cause of a great deal of discontent should be totally repealed. Then he mentioned the Seditious Meeting Act, the News-

papers Incitement to Offences Act and the Act relating to Conspiracies, which should be examined carefully and amended suitably in the light of expert advice. He ended his speech by dwelling on the broader aspects of the question and appealed to Government and the members of the Council to make a compact of "high-hearted comradeship" in the great task of reconciliation. In a moving peroration he said :

"In giving such liberties as may seem suitable, in taking such steps as may seem advisable, let there be no reservations to the extent that you wish to go. Go ahead bravely and not haltingly. It is the most essential condition of success in this great work. But us no buts; let there not be a superabundance of ifs. So working we certainly will do what no other people in the world have done : achieve full constitutional liberty within the British Empire by entirely peaceful and constitutional methods."

It is indicative both of the change of attitude on the part of the Government of India and of the great prestige and influence which Sastri had with the Viceroy and his colleagues that a committee to go into the repeal of repressive laws was appointed and that most of the laws which substituted executive action for judicial enquiry, including the heinous Rowlatt Act, were repealed.

Sastri was hailed as the most brilliant parliamentarian of his day. He won a great name as a vigilant champion of civil liberties and as a stout opponent of the inequalities and inequities arising from a feeling of racial superiority on the part of the Europeans. The following account which Sastri gave of a visit he had from a haughty European is both amusing and revealing :

"I had a visit from a European friend in those anxious days. He came literally on a high horse and

without sending in a card, he shouted my name. Duly I appeared before the noble visitor and took him inside my room. 'Look here', he began, 'we are just now giving you a measure of self-government; we are going to trust you. Is this the reward that we get, viz., that you want these racial discriminations to be instantly abolished?' I gave him a suitable reply. The result was that in a couple of minutes the gentleman began to converse in a chastened mood."

Owing to his many deputations abroad for important conferences Sastri had to be frequently away from the Council of State. After the grievous disappointment over Kenya*, his health declined and he resigned early in 1925 from his membership of the Council. In his speech to the members of the Council on the 20th January, 1925, the Viceroy Lord Reading said :—

"There have also been a few changes among the members of the Legislature to which I need not refer in detail; but I am convinced that the members of both the Houses will join me in deploring that ill-health has necessitated the resignation of the Right Honourable Srinivasa Sastri, who has been a member of the Council of State since its inception. I trust his absence from the Legislature will only be temporary and brief and that he will soon be restored to health and enabled once more to add the distinction of his intellectual greatness to the Legislature and to devote his great capacities to public affairs."

He also wrote a personal letter on January 10, 1925, wishing Sastri complete recovery and early return to public life. Sastri replied in the most courteous and grateful terms and said :

"I am overwhelmed. On the top of a cordial letter

*See Chapter IX

in your own hand, you have made a public reference to me in terms of excessive consideration. So much out of the way is it that I have actually been asked whether I am about to retire altogether from public life that the Viceroy should pay a farewell-seeming compliment! How can I thank you adequately? Well, I shall not attempt it, but beg you to imagine the feelings of a man of simple ways who finds himself suddenly smothered beneath garlands and bouquets of exquisite beauty and fragrance.

“Politics, in human practice, divides more than it unites and wrests us, alas, from our real nature so much that sometimes we hardly know ourselves. We are more akin than we realise; a human touch like the one I have just experienced at your hands is a revelation of the golden chain that binds us all together, but is so seldom seen.”

CHAPTER VII

THE CONFERENCE ERA

Srinivasa Sastri was already in England as a member of the Acworth Committee on Railways in India when he was nominated a member of the Indian Delegation to the Imperial Conference of 1921 along with the Maharao of Cutch. Purushotamdas Thakurdas, a most able and patriotic businessman of Bombay, was a very active member of the Acworth Committee. He was strongly in favour of State management of railways and supported this view with a wealth of facts and figures. As Sastri was busy with the Imperial Conference, he could not attend the meetings of the Acworth Committee regularly. Purushotamdas canvassed Sastri's views and obtained from him a long letter in favour of State management of Railways. This letter was crucial and helped Purushotamdas to win Acworth, a particularly fair and open-minded Chairman, on the side of State management. It was the Chairman's casting vote that resulted in a majority report in favour of State management.*

The Imperial Conference commenced its sittings on June 20, 1921. Sastri sat next to Montagu, the leader of the Indian delegation, and they frequently exchanged notes during the discussions. These notes† later published by Sastri, show how completely Montagu identified himself with the Indian cause and how much he relied on Sastri to promote it.

The Prime Minister of Britain, Llyod George, made an opening speech referring to the high ideals of the British Empire. Sastri was quick to seize the opportunity of underlying these lofty sentiments of the Prime Minister

*See Frank Moraes : "Sir Purushotamdas Thakurdas" PP. 30-34

†"Letters of Srinivasa Sastri" PP. 107-113

when he made his first speech at the Imperial Conference on June 21. He said :

“We have great tasks. Let little things be got out of the way. I only wish that all our common energies should be bent towards realising more and more within the British Empire and extending further and further outside the British Empire those generous ideals of progress to which, Sir, you gave such inspiring and, if I may say so, such alluring expression yesterday.”

Sastri also made pointed but dignified allusion to the fact that India was not yet a Dominion. “The Maharao of Cutch and I cannot fail to remember that the position we occupy here is not comparable by any means to the position occupied by our colleagues from the Dominions. They are called here by virtue of their being Prime Ministers. We come by nomination from our Government. We realise that that marks a great difference in our status. We hope that next year or the year after our successors will come by a better right. The man who takes my place may be elected by the Central legislature of the land. We have not yet acquired full Dominion status, but we realise that we are planted firmly on the road to the acquisition of the status.”

At the Imperial Conference Sastri found himself in the company of some of the greatest men of Britain and the Commonwealth. He easily shone as their equal. Though he was a representative of the Government of India which was still not a self-governing Dominion, he proved as effective as any representative of a Dominion could be. In a letter to his son he says :

“The British Cabinet is far and away the ablest governing body in the world—Balfour, Curzon, Churchill, Lloyd George—where are their equals? Smuts comes near and is greatly respected. But he lacks their knowledge and width of outlook and is

now in sharp antithesis to their policy. Hughes (of Australia) is an able downright chap, very deaf and full of mannerism, but dogged and full of fight. Meighen of Canada is a quiet, shrewd lawyer who has his own views and sticks to them. He is not an impressive or forceful speaker, but has character and steadiness of purpose.....

"Massey (of New Zealand) is a huge unlovely figure, rather simple-minded and straight, but has great experience of practical administration. He is rather fond of speaking though he is not good at it. There are a few honest ideas that have obtained lodgement in his mind and as they are imperialistic they show off well and bear repetition. He is endless on them. Curzon's diction and balance are amazing even in ordinary table talk. He grips you at once by his power. Having no love of his politics, I own I felt flattered when he noticed me of his own accord and said nice things of Gokhale. Churchill, of course, is brilliant. His performance is not so even as Curzon's but every now and then he throws out sparks which come from real genius and not merely please, but open out spacious and large aspects of the subject. No wonder he is indispensable, though erratic and unstable.

"Balfour is a class by himself. Somehow he fascinates me. He talks little and seems occasionally to sleep. When he opens his lips it is worth anybody's while to listen. I confess he has not added to my knowledge, but I am struck by the detachment and serenity of his judgement as well as by the scholarly pose which fits him so eminently."

Sastri's work at the Imperial Conference involved him in a mission which was destined to occupy some of the

fruitful years of his life—the struggle for equal citizenship for our nationals abroad. It may well be said that he was the inheritor of Gokhale's mission and Gandhi's, too, in championing the status of Indians overseas. At the Imperial Conference he came into conflict with the great statesman, who was then the Prime Minister of South Africa, General Smuts. Smuts was no ordinary antagonist. His great services to the Empire in the first World War had given him high prestige in imperial circles, and as one of the founders of the League of Nations, he came to be renowned as an idealist working for world peace and harmony. But this great man had a skeleton in his cupboard—the colour bar in South Africa over which he had, a decade before, come into conflict with Mahatma Gandhi and he now came into conflict with Sastri. Smuts did all he could during the Conference and outside it to canvass opinion against the resolution that Sastri tabled demanding equality of citizenship for Indians domiciled in the Dominions on a par with other Dominion citizens. On July 7, 1921 Sastri moved the following resolution:

“This Conference, while reaffirming the Resolution of the Imperial War Conference of 1918 that each community of the British Commonwealth should enjoy complete control of the composition of its own population by means of restrictions on immigration from any of the other communities, recognises that there is an incongruity between the position of India as an equal member of the British Empire and the existence of disabilities upon British Indians lawfully domiciled in some other parts of the Empire. The conference accordingly is of the opinion that in the interests of the solidarity of the British Commonwealth it is desirable that the rights of such Indians to citizenship should be recognised.”

Conference at close quarters. In a 'London Letter' of the time, he wrote as follows :

"He (Mr. Sastri) has imposed a dignified and public-spirited personality upon the members of the Imperial Conference. Though, technically, he is representing the Government of India, he is doing a great deal more. He speaks boldly and courageously, yet with a fine and supple courtesy, on behalf of his country as an Indian imbued with a most ardent patriotism.... At the conference he created a sensation in all quarters by the energetic and firm exposition that he delivered of the views of India on the question of the Imperial Citizenship and the status and disabilities of Indian Communities overseas."

Even in the midst of the most engrossing political work, Sastri found time to write long and fascinating letters to his friends and the members of his family. A letter written to his son from Chequers shows how in the midst of subtle political negotiations, he kept his literary curiosity alive :

"A neighbouring village has the glory of owning Milton. Down below this house, about a mile and half away, is the little church—a pretty place it is—where Hampden collected his parishioners and harangued them on the inequity of shipmoney—his share was 13s. 6d. as the document, still preserved, shows.

"In this house, there once lived the daughter of Cromwell, and they recently discovered a cast of the Protector, hidden within a wall, huge nose, vest and all. A letter of his written on the field of Marston is on view. Stoke Pogis, where Gray wrote his Elegy, is about half an hour by motor. I did not realise before why he wrote, as examples of unrealised greatness, of a village Hampden, a mute Milton and a guiltless Cromwell."

Sastri's services at the Imperial Conference won him great laurels and he was made a member of the Privy Council. As a very special case, he was excused from having to wear the very costly dress prescribed for the swearing-in ceremony at the Buckingham Palace and he appeared before His Majesty in his own turbaned majesty. He was also honoured with the Freedom of the City of London. The speech which he made on the occasion has become a classic and gone into English textbooks in India. He called the British Empire the greatest temple of freedom on this planet and warned against any one who blasphemed and violated that freedom. He made a moving appeal to Britain to admit India as a full and equal partner in the glory of the Empire and the service of humanity. Sastri's faith in empire citizenship was then out of tune with the prevailing atmosphere in India, but perhaps he saw far ahead into the future and anticipated the day when the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, would receive the Freedom of the City of London and proclaim the free partnership of the Commonwealth.

When the Government of India chose Sastri as their delegate to the Second Assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva in September 1921, they could not have made a more appropriate choice. Sastri's mind was truly international. An ardent patriot and fighter for Indian freedom as he was, in mind and spirit he belonged to the whole world, not merely to a country or a nation. Thanks to Montagu, India became an original member of the League of Nations. Though India was not a Dominion, she took her place in the League of Nations in her own right and as a member of the British Empire. While the British and the Indian delegations met informally and discussed matters, India was free to vote as she liked. At the Second Assembly where Sastri was present, on three occasions India cast her

votes differently from the votes of Great Britain. Indeed, at the League of Nations Sastri figured as much more than an official representative. He became the symbol of an ancient culture steeped in the philosophy of *shanti* (peace). Till he ascended the platform in the second week of the Assembly's sittings only the white turban gracefully poised above his serene countenance marked out Sastri for notice. From that day onward he became suddenly famous as one of the foremost orators in the Assembly, and in the opinion of many as *the* foremost orator at Geneva. In the midst of an Assembly, full of speculation and high hopes and some cynicism too, Sastri sounded the note of positive and enthusiastic faith. He said :

“Hard and cold, indeed, must be the heart that fails to be touched, and touched to noble issues, by a spectacle such as this. The nations of the world foregather from the ends of our continents, representing many shades of colour, many varieties of political and social thought, and many states and grades of culture and advance in all directions— people small and great, weak and strong, but all alike weary of the mistaken past, eager for a better day for mankind, and resolved, with bruised and bleeding hearts, to stand by higher ideals for humankind.”

Sastri's faith in the League found an echo in many a bosom, and his speech was listened to with rapt attention. Wilson Harris, a great journalist, wrote at the time :

“The hour was late. The hall was slowly emptying. Between the beginning of Mr. Sastri's speech and its end it emptied no more. The slow sentences with their faultless phrasing compelled attention. Here was a new voice, the expression of the conclusions of a new mind playing on the League.”

After affirming India's faith in the League and her loyalty to its ideals, Sastri made a fervent appeal for equitable treatment to India in regard to representation on the Secretariat of the League and in the International Labour Association. He went on to refer to the position of the C-type Mandates which were entrusted to certain powers to be governed under "their law" as integral parts of their territories. He warned against the intrusion of the colour bar in these territories and reminded the mandatory powers that the mandates were "a sacred trust of civilisation" to be governed in accordance with the Charter of the League without racial discrimination.

Those were days of great orators—Balfour, Briand, Viviani, Cecil and Ramsay MacDonald and a host of others. Briand (in French) and Sastri (in English) were regarded as the two greatest orators at the League of Nations.

Sastri was again India's representative on the British Empire delegation at the Conference on the Limitation of Armaments held in Washington in November 1921. It was convened by President Harding, and five Great Powers were represented at the Conference—the United States, the British Empire, France, Italy and Japan. The primary business of the Conference was the reduction of naval armaments. Mr. Balfour headed the British delegation; the Secretary of State, Charles Evans Hughes, the American; and Briand, the French. Sastri was unknown to America before the Conference. But, as at Geneva, his very first speech marked him out for fame as a most finished speaker. He did not present a purely official view, still less a purely British official view. He spoke as an authentic representative of Indian national culture and character. He created a deep impression on leading Americans when he addressed a

large meeting of members of the American Congress on the political situation in India.

The Washington Disarmament Conference stands unique in history for the manner in which its momentous decisions were arrived at. President Harding who opened the Conference said : "I can speak officially only for the United States. Our hundred millions frankly want less of armaments and none of war." Then the President withdrew. Secretary Hughes who was appointed the Chairman of the Conference said : "The time has come and this Conference has been called, not for general resolution or mutual advice, but for action." He followed this emphatic statement with the most precise and detailed proposals for the limitation of naval armaments, the United States itself to set the highest example of renunciation in this regard. Incredibly enough, even Balfour had not been given any hint of the thunderbolt to come. But the "new diplomacy" worked. Balfour agreed and so did everyone, except for one reservation which Japan made with regard to a particular ship for sentimental reasons. Sastri was profoundly impressed by the dramatic challenge of the whole proceedings. He wrote in a private letter of the time :

"The atmosphere at Washington, however, was fully charged with the spirit of the new diplomacy. The delegations did not take long to realise that the world had become tired of the traditional hypocrisy of European Chancellories and that the hour had struck for a striking manifestation of the new international morality. The deafening applause that greeted the announcement by Balfour and Kato of the consents of their Governments was only the outward symbol of the rejoicings of the earth's peoples. The old diplomacy is dead, long live the new."

In the midst of his public triumph, Death poured a bitter drop of private grief in his ear. News of his younger daughter Savitri's death reached Sastri while he was in Washington. In the anguish of the crushing grief he wrote to his elder daughter Rukhmini :

“By now you will all have got over the first shock of grief. I am just under it. I scarcely know what to write. Don't cry, darling. I am crying enough. Take care of mother. Fate has been hard on her. If I had sent the watch and other things as soon as I bought them she might have seen them. How foolish of me to think so! She must have thought of me and asked for me now and then; oh God! I can't endure it.”

Chapter VIII

DOMINION TOUR

On return from Washington to London, Srinivas Sastri was distressed to find that even the more progressive opinion in England was hostile to India, consequent on the Non-co-operation Movement and the boycott of the Prince of Wales. Sastri had anticipated the boycott and advised King George V against the visit of the Prince of Wales. When Sastri returned to India in the last week of March 1922, he found the country in an outward lull of peace but totally lacking the inward peace of the heart and soul. It could not be otherwise. Mahatma Gandhi had been arrested and with him a large number of his followers all over the country. The hand of repression was severe. Sastri laden with fame at London, Geneva and Washington, returned only to face obloquy as an opponent of a popular movement headed by an adored leader.

On May 7, 1922 Sastri presided over the Bombay Provincial Liberal Congress. His presidential address was a bold and masterly analysis of the prevailing political situation, sparing neither the Government whose minion he was alleged to be, nor Mahatma Gandhi whom he venerated for his saintly purity. He condemned the terrorism practised by the Government in the so-called interests of law and order. He deplored:

“I have never known such profound distrust of Government as there is today, such absolute lack of faith in their sincerity, such rooted tendency to put aside all their pledges and promises and declarations of intentions as of no value whatever.”

He evaluated the Non-co-operation Movement with fairminded balance. At the outset, he spoke words from

the depths of his heart saying that the Movement had the exceptional advantage of having from the very start the guidance of "one, whose character is above cavil and whose motives are beyond suspicion." He then gave his unaffected tribute to the way in which the prestige and popularity of Mahatma Gandhi and the Non-co-operation Movement were lent to the great social causes like the elevation of the depressed classes, the removal of untouchability, prohibition and Swadeshi. In equally fervent terms, he recorded his admiration of the way in which this Movement carried to the remotest parts of the country the gospel of Swaraj and the way in which it had evoked the patriotic sense of the young people and upheld to them the high duty of sacrifice for the motherland. Then he proceeded to mention more in sorrow than in censure the ill-effects of the Movement, the destruction of private and public property that the country had had to suffer, the pretext that the movement had afforded Government to employ forces of repression almost without restraint, the outburst of ill-feeling between races and between communities, and the curious psychology that had taken possession of the people, young and old, villagers and townsmen, men and women, which made them feel that on each and every occasion they must boycott, they must withdraw, they must non-co-operate. Above all, Sastri's objection to the Movement was that, started with the object of hitting the Government and saving the people, it tended in effect to hit the people more and more and plunge them deeper and deeper in suffering. Sastri turned to the Government and asked them to restore peace by reducing the volume of suffering caused by the imprisonment of thousands of respected Indian citizens who, though technically political offenders, were animated by unselfish ideals. Naturally Sastri's speech displeased alike the extremist nationalists and the prestige-ridden bureau-

crats. *The Statesman* of Calcutta summed up Sastri's liberalism as an "approximation to the political sentiments of those who filled the extremist camp."

When it was announced that Sastri would visit New Zealand, Australia and Canada as a representative of the Government of India to plead with the Governments and peoples of those countries for equality of citizenship for Indians domiciled in their regions, Sastri's popularity did not improve either with his own countrymen or with the fire-eating Anglo-Indian press. The Viceroy Lord Reading gave a banquet in honour of Sastri in Simla on May 12, 1922, on the eve of his departure to the Dominions. Eulogising Sastri's services, Lord Reading said that they were already recognised as "an important page in history" and read out a message of congratulations and good wishes from Viscount Peel, the Secretary of State for India. Sastri made a memorable speech on the occasion in which he underlined his unquenchable faith in the British Commonwealth as the healer of discords, the promoter of harmony among different races, and the reconciler between the East and the West. He also did some plain speaking. Rising above the conventions of a complimentary banquet he said, "We never have seen in the country such a wreck of hope and faith in Government of the day. I say this in all solemnity." The Civil Services and the Anglo-Indian Press were scandalised that Sastri should have made use of the banquet occasion for criticising the Government. Sastri himself recalling the incident in his last years mentioned it with humility and remorse as an unfair lapse of taste on his part.

When he left on his Dominion tour his unpopularity amongst the Congressmen and the Indian people in general reached its peak. Jawaharlal Nehru looked upon him as an "imperial envoy", while in Sastri's own mind and heart

and in the opinion of disinterested students of Indian affairs like H.L.S. Polak, he was discharging a patriotic duty calculated to raise the status of Indians settled in the Dominions and, indeed, to lift the image of India in the eyes of the world at large.

Everywhere Sastri was received most warmly and his personality and eloquence created a marvellous impression. His greatest triumph was in Australia. Mr. Hughes, the Prime Minister of Australia, wrote to Sastri at the end of his visit bearing eloquent and sincere testimony to the success of his mission:

“Your presence here has been of itself an education to most of us. You have, by your speeches and your presence, lifted the curtain of prejudice and want of knowledge and revealed to us something of India as it really is. By those admirable speeches of yours you have educated public opinion inside and outside the Parliament, made that possible which before your visit was impossible, and you have brought those reforms covered or suggested by the resolutions of 1918 and 1921 Conferences within the range of practical politics.....Your brilliant advocacy on behalf of your country has borne good fruit. If there are any temporary delays in the realisation of the aspirations you have so ably voiced, do not be impatient. You have achieved wonders and in my opinion removed for all time those prejudices and misunderstandings which formerly prevented the admission of your countrymen resident in Australia to the enjoyment of the full rights of citizenship.”

Sastri's mission in Australia bore fruit early enough. In 1925 the Australian Parliament passed legislation admitting Indians resident in the country to full citizenship.

A criticism was levelled against Sastri that he had surrendered in the matter of White Australia Policy. The 'surrender', if any, in this matter of freedom for the Dominions to determine the composition of their population by restricting immigration had been made by Gandhi and Gokhale earlier with respect to South Africa, and by Lord Sinha at the Imperial Conference of 1918. This policy which was stated not in racial but in general terms and could apply to any people from any part of the world, was reiterated at the Imperial Conference of 1921 and with the profound addition that there must be equality of citizenship in the case of Indians already domiciled in the Dominions. In the face of these historical circumstances it would have been a diplomatic blunder on Sastri's part to ask for free immigration into Australia. All he could do as a representative of his country, with a sense of honour and international obligation, was to make it clear that though he did not question the White Australia Policy, he did not, at the same time, approve of it. Here is a quotation from one of his speeches which shows his statesmanlike and honourable attitude in the matter:

"I am not going to discuss, as part of my mission, the White Australia Policy. It is there. We accept it and take it as settled. In India, to the extent that the people there understand it, they do not think that it is consistent with the integrity of the British Empire. Those who see it from a theoretical point of view think that it is not maintaining the solidarity of the British Empire. We think that common citizenship of the Empire carries with it the right to move about freely within the Empire, to stay where one pleases, to practise any profession for which a person might be qualified, and to develop his faculties or capacity to the fullest possible extent under the laws of the Dominion or

possession where he might be settled. The White Australia Policy goes clean against this principle or ideal, basing its justification on the right of each self-governing Dominion to control the nature of its own population and to preserve its type of civilization and economic life. By a compromise arrived at in 1918 at the Imperial War Conference, India has agreed to respect the wishes of each Dominion in this regard and so I am not free to question it."

It was also said against Sastri by his extreme critics that he had pictured the British Empire in terms of panegyric. But what Sastri actually did was to picture to the Australians an ideal British Empire with justice, fair play and perfect equality amongst its components which alone would have the moral authority to include India in it. Another criticism was that he had dealt with the Non-co-operation Movement and condemned it. Sastri had naturally to deal with the then political situation in India in his speeches. But as is usual with him he did it with a supple courtesy and exemplary fairness. While he deplored the Non-co-operation Movement, he portrayed the many-sided greatness of Mahatma Gandhi with admiration and understanding, thereby increasing the circle of Mahatma Gandhi's admirers and the prestige of the Indian nation.

From Australia Sastri went to New Zealand, where his task was comparatively easy because Indians there had already got the franchise on a level with the Whites. He had to straighten out difficulties with regard to old age pensions and hardships in securing certain types of employment. He also made representations to the Government of New Zealand regarding certain difficulties experienced by Indians with regard to temporary visits to New Zealand. Sastri suggested to the Government of India in his report on the Dominion tour that they should have a protector of

Indians or a Consular Officer in Australia, New Zealand and the Fiji Islands so that the presence of a sympathetic and duly accredited representative of their country could clear the difficulties which might arise between the Dominion Governments and the Government of India in matters of Indian entry or immigration.

In Canada his work was more difficult. Mr. Meighen who was Sastri's friend at the Imperial Conference in 1921 and was enthusiastic about his visit to Canada, had ceased to be the Prime Minister and Mr. Mackenzie King had succeeded him. Mr. King who had heard of the overwhelming effect of Sastri's eloquence on Australian and New Zealand audiences, was not anxious to expose Canada to a similar effect. So he advised Sastri that he should avoid public speaking. After anxious thought, Sastri decided to pursue the course which he had pursued in Australia and New Zealand and made an appeal to the electorate themselves. In fact, Sastri's Canadian speeches were more fiery and challenging than his speeches in the other two Dominions. For instance, in his speech at the Reform Club of Montreal, Sastri was outspoken to a degree and the sentiment contained in the paragraph given below is not exactly moderate:

"Neither Britain nor any Dominion can afford to play bully with India any longer, and we in India, let me tell you once for all, are determined to be bullied no longer. If we are going to be equal partners with the rest of the Empire in the maintenance of peace, we will contribute what we can to its might, strength and majesty, for we have a contribution to make to the world, and we are prepared and willing to make it under the Union Jack, if the Union Jack is going to bring us the maintenance of self-respect, and our own sense of honour. Otherwise, much as we should

regret it, we must seek our political salvation outside of of this great political organization.”

The visit to Canada, however, ended on a note of hope and success. The Prime Minister, Mr. Mackenzie King wrote to Sastri:

“I desire to assure you that at the earliest favourable moment the Government will be pleased to invite the consideration of Parliament to your request that the natives of India resident in Canada be granted Dominion Parliamentary Franchise on terms and conditions identical with those which govern the exercise of that right by the Canadian citizens generally.”

(In 1947, Canada admitted Indians domiciled there to full citizenship, and even permitted fresh immigration on a restricted scale.)

Apart from the negotiations over equality of citizenship and matters relating to employment, trade, education, etc., Sastri's visit did much to open the eyes of these parts of the world to the great history and culture of India and won sympathy for her struggles and aspirations. Indeed, Sastri was India's first and, till today, her greatest ambassador. In his noble bearing, sweet reasonableness, capacity to understand the other man's point of view, high intellectual gifts and shining eloquence he had the makings of an ideal ambassador. It was fortunate for India that Sastri was seen and heard in the great councils of the world and parliaments of man. In the words of C.F. Andrews, he did more than any other Indian statesman to raise the name of the country in the Dominions and elsewhere.

CHAPTER IX

“KENYA LOST, EVERYTHING LOST”

Srinivasa Sastri returned to India from his tour of the Dominions on November 24, 1922. To his great grief, even his dear friends and relations could only give him at best a tear of sorrow and a word of condolence that he had the misfortune to undertake an unpopular mission. With characteristic fortitude and strength of conviction, Sastri went his way unaffected by the general opprobrium he had to face. In December 1922 he presided over the session of the National Liberal Federation of India at Nagpur. In the course of his address Sastri pleaded for rapid Indianisation of the services and Indianisation of the Army. Referring to the working of the constitutional reforms, he said that it was full of promise and gave cause for gratification. He wanted constitutional advance without waiting for the ten-year period prescribed by the British Government. In his peroration Sastri made two things clear. The Liberal Party should never countenance disobedience of law including non-violent Non-co-operation. They should also never hesitate to oppose even the highest authority on acts of injustice and neglect of duty. He said:

“Our English brethren must understand this clearly. Every day we shall ask, what has been done today towards the advent of Swaraj? Of every officer we shall inquire, does he realise that he is here to fit our people for self-rule? Of every rupee of expenditure we shall require to be satisfied that it was unavoidable and in the interests of India. We believe in the ideals of the Britannic Commonwealth, we cherish our connection with it, trusting that our equal partnership therein, which has been admitted in theory, will soon be translated

into fact in all essentials. We believe in the efficacy of peaceful and constitutional methods, and in the pursuit of our high aims, we are upheld by the consciousness that they have been admitted as proper and legitimate by the highest authority. And as our motto is ordered progress, we do not despise compromise in public affairs, provided it is honourable, advances the present position and does not bar further progress."

Soon after his return from the Dominion tour the subject of the position of Indians in the Crown Colony of Kenya loomed large in Sastri's mind. He referred to it in his address to the Liberal Federation and said that "great interest attaches to the colony of Kenya where the relations between the white settlers and our countrymen were so strained that influential men in London threw up their hands in despair." Indians had settled in Kenya even in the latter half of the last century, long before there were any white settlers. According to the testimony borne years ago by Winston Churchill himself in his *East African Travel*, the Indian settlers had done excellent spade work long before it became a British Colony and attracted an enterprising group of British settlers to whom immense tracts of land were conceded by the new British authorities. The British settlers were in fact protected by the Indians against the Germans and Hungarians in the first World War. The Indians perished in large numbers in the battle field. The British white settlers, though a minority, with their push and authority dominated the scene. The Indians had long suffered racial segregation, commercial discrimination and inferior citizenship. With political advance and the growing freedom movement in their motherland, the Indians in Kenya naturally became conscious of their own rights and demanded equality with Europeans. They were supported by the Government of India and public opinion

in India. The Indians in Kenya were offered two elected seats in the legislature and, that too, on a separate electoral roll. Naturally there was a vigorous protest from the Indian people and particular alarm was caused by the proposal of the Kenya whites that immigration of Indians should be restricted. The right to equal citizenship for Indians in the Dominions had been conceded in principle by the Imperial Conference of 1921 with the sole dissenting vote of South Africa. Churchill, the then Secretary of State for the Crown Colonies, though in sympathy with General Smuts's stand in respect of South Africa, had declared at the Imperial Conference, largely as a result of the overwhelming pressure of Sastri's able advocacy:

"I think there is only one ideal that the British Empire can set before itself in this regard, and that is that there should be no barrier of race, colour or creed which should prevent any man by merit from reaching any station if he is fitted for it. At any rate, I do not feel able to adopt any lesser statement of principle in regard to the Colonies."

Unfortunately, Churchill was not firm in his stand. He hesitated and finally fell into the hands of the white settlers who, led by Lord Delamere, threatened rebellion against Britain. However, negotiations between the India Office and the Colonial Office in London resulted in the Wood-Winterton Agreement which conceded some points in favour of the Indian settlers. However, it was a pity that the matter was not finally composed when Churchill was in office. For, the Duke of Devonshire and Lord Peel who succeeded him repudiated the Wood-Winterton Agreement. It is a sad and perhaps sobering reflection that latter-day events have proved that General Smuts and Churchill were in their attitude to the Indian settler more friendly than their successors in office.

Feeling in India ran so high that the Government of India decided to send a deputation of Indian legislators headed by Sastri to present the case of Indians in Kenya for full citizenship and racial equality. Here again Sastri was India's first ambassador. Lord Delamere, the leader of the European settlers in Kenya, exercised great influence with the British Government and in the London political circles. He made the usual appeals to imperial interests and he even professed to stand for the interests of the native races of East Africa. It was known at the time that he had also held out threats of open rebellion against the British Government in case the interests of British settlers in Kenya were not fully protected. Sastri had thus to meet an influential and ruthless opponent and also a very highly organised campaign which disregarded all promises and pretensions to justice, fairplay and equality of races in the British Empire. The European statement ran:

"Durban has closed the back door into Africa and Mombasa must close the front door."

Soon after arriving in London the Indian delegations from Kenya and India agreed upon a plan of negotiations. In a letter to G.A. Natesan, dated 22nd May, 1923, Sastri wrote :

"This agreement was reached at a meeting convened by the Aga Khan in the Ritz Hotel on the night of the 3rd of this month after a long discussion: (1) We are to stand firm for India's right of emigration to Kenya, no more restriction than there is at present. (2) On the other points we should abide by the Wood-Winterton Agreement, *i.e.*, no segregation; the Highlands question to remain open: the franchise to be common, based on uniform qualifications, ten per cent of our community to get the vote, and the constituencies

to be so arranged as to give us four out of the total of eleven elective seats."

Sastri spent hard days and sleepless nights, speaking, writing, interviewing and gathering all the support he could in favour of the Indian case. He wrote in a letter to his brother Ramaswami Sastri:

"My interviews with Lord Peel and Lord Winter-ton and then with Sir Louis Kershaw were long affairs. I kept nothing from them and was more blunt than is my nature. I spoke sharply in places and surprised even Jamnadas. Lord Peel has been very good to us, arranging several luncheon parties where we could meet influential persons."

Polak and Andrews, well known for their intimate knowledge of the problem of Indians overseas and their sympathy and sense of justice in the matter, worked hard in support of the Indian case. Polak also acted as a moderating influence on the Indian deputations from Kenya and India.

It proved, however, that the Indian delegates got in reality little more than a formal hearing, though a polite one. They were soon confronted with a decision which the British Government called a compromise and the Indian delegations regarded as a grievous surrender of their rights. When the White Paper was published, the Indian case was defeated on two out of the three main issues—the franchise on a common electoral roll and the opening of the Highlands to Indian settlers, which had so far been solely reserved for the white men as the most salubrious part of the country. Only on one point there was a decision in favour of the Indian settlers, namely on the immigration of Indians into East Africa; for, it was decided by the Colonial Office that no restrictions bearing a racial character would be legally imposed on Indians desiring to come to

Kenya. The retention in law of the freedom of entry, though important, offered little comfort to Sastri, when racial discrimination in a Crown Colony was frankly accepted by the White Paper in all other matters.

To Sastri, Kenya became the acid test of Britain's sincerity to maintain the equality of all its citizens in the eye of law. He had a profound faith in the high ideals of the British Empire and in the sincerity of the British statesmen to maintain these ideals. When Sastri realised with grief that he was fighting a losing cause, his health was shattered, but still he kept on in the midst of discouragement. Speaking at the Anti-slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, London, on June 5, 1923 Sastri made a moving and earnest plea to Britain to uphold its high traditions of freedom :

"During the war you rose to sympathy with the small nationalities of the world. You set the flag of freedom flying. I beg of you on my knees not to take it down. That flag of freedom was not of freedom for you alone, but for the world and especially for the League of Nations which we call the British Commonwealth. I beg you not to dishonour the Union Jack."

He rose from his sick bed to address a large meeting in Queen's Hall presided over by Ramsay MacDonald. When at last, after months of fruitless negotiations the Baldwin Cabinet decided the dispute entirely against the Indian claims, Sastri's faith in British sincerity to maintain racial equality was torn to pieces. Everything he held dear in his political conviction seemed to perish at one stroke. For, he had always held "that what is apparently beyond the American Republic, the solution of the coloured problem, is going to be one of the greatest achievements of the British Commonwealth." In utter disappointment, he raised a loud lamentation :

"The people of India are no longer equal partners in the British Empire, but unredeemed helots in a Boer Empire."

He cried in agony, **"Kenya lost, everything lost."** These words of his became proverbial. His own moderation in political outlook faced a severe strain. He wrote to his daughter on August 1, 1923:

"I am so distracted by the wrong turn of events. I could not rest even if I stayed here. Better come home at once. My future course is no more clear than the future of our unhappy country."

He wrote on August 17, 1923 to Benarsi Das Chaturvedi:

"My outlook is changed. I am not able yet to place myself in the future politics of India."

In those days of storm and stress Sastri was compelled by ill-health to go into a nursing home in London where the doctors ordered absolute rest. His heart disease had been aggravated by the daily humiliations and bitter sorrow and suffering he had to experience in the Kenya negotiations. He regarded the Kenya settlement as a grave national humiliation. His speeches and statements on Kenya are acid and flaming, not to be easily rivalled by any extremist pen or tongue. He poured out his heart in burning eloquence:

"How short is human memory! It is not so long ago that no words were good enough for the Indian for his services during the War, his loyalty, his bravery on the battlefield and the rich compensations he had earned. Where are the pledges gone, and the full rights of citizenship and absolute equality and ungrudging partnership in the Empire? They came from Royalty, from responsible Ministers, from the Press and from the platform, with every grade of solemnity

and in every tone of sonorous phrasing.....
After waiting for a long time with his proverbial patience and after earning equal treatment a hundred times over, and after endless expostulations and entreaties, and having declared that Kenya supplied the acid test of Empire and his position in the Empire, the Indian has been cruelly betrayed. The victim of many broken pledges, the dupe of many solemn promises, his faith in the character for justice and impartiality of the British Empire seemed almost incurable. He is at last undeceived."

To show his grief and resentment he boycotted the British Empire Exhibition that was then held in London.

He came back to India in August 1923, sick in body, grieved in mind and sore in spirit. It took a whole year for his body to recover and for his equanimity to be restored.

CHAPTER X

STRUGGLE FOR CONSTITUTIONAL ADVANCE

Mahatma Gandhi who was undergoing imprisonment at the Yerawada jail suddenly fell ill on the 21st January, 1924. The authorities removed him to the Sasson Hospital. He had to be operated upon immediately for appendicitis and he was asked whether he would like to have any friends brought to see him. He mentioned the names of Srinivasa Sastri, Dr. Phatak (of the Non-co-operation Party) and N. C. Kelkar. At about 9.00 p.m. Sastri, who was then luckily in Poona, was called to the Sasson Hospital. In his *Minutes of Visit to Mr. Gandhi* which he published the next day, Sastri has left an absorbing account of his visit to the Mahatma on this critical occasion. Gandhiji, even in that moment of extreme suffering attended by a risk to his very life, made enquiries of Sastri's health, his wife's and that of his colleagues in the Servants of India Society. He said to Sastri, if there should arise any public agitation, it should be made known that he had no complaint whatever to make against the authorities and that so far as the care of his body went their treatment left nothing to be desired. He dictated a "longish statement" addressed to Col. Maddock, who was to perform the operation, which Sastri took down in pencil. The letter acknowledged the great kindness and attention he had received from Col. Maddock and requested him to perform the operation at once as delay would in the opinion of the Colonel involve serious risk. When Gandhiji signed the statement his hand shook very much and Sastri noticed that he did not dot the 'i' at the end. To quote from Sastri's *Minutes*:

"As the operation room was being got ready, the

doctors went out and I found myself nearly alone with the Mahatma. After a remark or two of a purely personal nature I asked him whether he had anything particular to say. I noticed a touch of eagerness as he replied as though he was waiting for an opportunity to say something. 'If there is an agitation' he said, 'for my release after this operation, which I do not wish, let it be on proper lines. My quarrel with Government is there and will continue so long as the originating causes exist. Of course there can't be any conditions. If Government think they have kept me long enough they may let me out—that would be honourable. If they think I am an innocent man and that my motives have been good, that while I have a deep quarrel with Government I love Englishmen and have many friends among them, they may release me. But it must not be on false issues. Any agitation must be kept on proper non-violent lines. Perhaps I have not expressed myself quite well, but you had better put it in your own words and inimitable style.' I mentioned the motions of which notice had been given in the Assembly and added that though Government might in other circumstances have opposed them, I expected that they would take a different line. I then pressed him again for a message to his people, his followers or the country. He was surprisingly firm on this subject. He said he was a prisoner of Government and he must observe the prisoners' code of honour scrupulously. He was supposed to be civilly dead. He had no knowledge of outside events and he could not have anything to do with the public; he had no message. 'How is it then that Mr. Mahomed Ali communicated a message as from you the other day?' The words were scarcely out of my mouth, when I regretted them. But recall was

impossible. He was obviously astonished at my question and exclaimed, 'Mr. Mahomed Ali? A message from me?' Luckily at this point the nurse came in with some articles of apparel for him and signalled to me to depart. In a few minutes he was shifted to the operation room. I sat outside marvelling at the exhibition I had witnessed of high-mindedness, forgiveness, chivalry and love, transcending ordinary human nature, and what a mercy it was that the Non-cooperation Movement should have had a leader of such serene vision and sensitiveness to honour."

Sastri's narrative is remarkable for its unadorned austerity combined with a natural vividness which tells in a simple, yet moving way, even the smallest significant detail which brings out the solemnity of the occasion and the incomparable greatness of the man involved in a personal crisis. The episode also brings out the mutual affection and respect that not only survived but grew between Gandhi and Sastri in the midst of the acutest political differences.

1924 witnessed a fresh struggle for constitutional advance towards self-government and renewed efforts at uniting the political parties towards a common goal. Mahatma Gandhi was released from jail after his operation for appendicitis. He had been shocked and distressed by the outbreaks of violence in the course of the Civil Disobedience Movement and he now began a period of self-questioning and purification of himself and his followers. He devoted himself to constructive work which he always held to be so vital to the uplift of the nation and to the moral regeneration of the people. He preached spinning in the *Charka* and weaving of *Khaddar* as a discipline and means of improving the villager's welfare. He

also advocated the abolition of liquor shops and the removal of untouchability.

Within the Congress a new development had taken place. C. R. Das, who had right from the beginning opposed the boycott of the legislative councils, formed, together with Pandit Motilal Nehru, the Swarajist Party. A struggle arose between the 'No-Changers' who stuck to the original Non-co-operation programme and the Swarajists who wished to contest elections and enter the legislatures with the declared purpose of wrecking them from within. Both wings of the Congress were as firm as ever in their affection and loyalty to Mahatma Gandhi, and Gandhi himself, while keeping to his own programme, gave freedom to the Swarajists to pursue their own path. They were returned in large numbers to the Central Legislative Assembly. The party made itself felt in the Assembly under the outstanding leadership of Pandit Motilal Nehru. They had their first triumph in electing Vithalbai Patel as the President of the Assembly. Though the Swarajists had the ostensible objective of wrecking the legislatures, they were no mere obstructionists and if Government had displayed true statesmanship, they could have converted them into co-operators and advanced the constitutional progress of the country. In fact, soon after their coming into the Assembly Pandit Motilal Nehru said: "We have come here to do something which we have not been doing so far. Sir, we have come here to offer our co-operation, non-co-operators as we are, if you will care to co-operate with us. That is why we are here. We are your men. But if you do not, we shall, like men, stand upon our rights and continue to be non-co-operators."

Sastri was happy about the return in large number of the Swarajists to the Assembly. He deplored that in the Central Provinces and Berar where the Swarajist Party had a distinct majority it did not accept office.

He was also sorry that the brilliant gifts of Pandit Motilal Nehru and his colleagues should be wasted in obstructionist tactics when they could be effectively used for building the nation's strength and prosperity. For, as he had said in his message to the National Conference convened by Mrs. Besant in February 1923, he was clear that "we cannot afford to countenance even for a moment the morbid cry : Paralyse the Government, paralyse the administration, and paralyse all national work till Swaraj is attained." On the other hand he held that "An attempt at constructing a system of National Education in the true sense of the word, at improving sanitation and through that means the vitality and efficiency of the people, and at building up our industries and manufactures, is no bar to constitutional advance or a dangerous distraction, but a necessary condition of it, inasmuch as it furnishes a practical proof of the utility of political power and draws an ever increasing circle of appreciative citizens into its pursuit."

When the Swarajists took the lead in presenting a National Demand to the British Government, Sastri approved of the idea and attended the meeting of the elected members of the legislatures, Central and provincial, in New Delhi on February 3, 1924 to discuss the Demand which asked for full Responsible Government including political, foreign and defence subjects. In view of the fact that the Labour Party had come into power in Britain and that their sympathy for our constitutional advance might be counted upon, Sastri wanted that we should help the Labour Government by exercising moderation and restraint in our demands. So he advised that defence, political and foreign departments might not be included in the National Demand at that stage of our constitutional advance. His advice was not heeded to. The Government committed its

own blunder of the first order when Sir. Malcom Hailey the Home Member, made a statement in the Assembly declaring that Responsible Government as envisaged by the Montford Reforms was not the same as Dominion Status. It was Sastri's feeling that altogether between the various contending and mutually irreconcilable forces another great opportunity for national solidarity and constitutional advance was lost.

Sastri could not attend the All-Party Conference at Sabarmati in April 1924 convened with a view to finding out ways and means of achieving unity among the political parties. In a letter to Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Sastri sent a short statement of his views. He said that so far as he was concerned there were certain difficulties in his rejoining the Congress, like the clause relating to spinning and wearing of *Khaddar*, and the lack of clarity regarding the position of the Congress in respect of entering Councils and accepting office, and the question of abandoning Civil Disobedience. He concluded his letter by saying:

"I wish that our reconciliation should be based on simple and intelligible agreements; and, being a man of peace, I am not attracted to the idea of re-entering the Congress as a disaffected minority with the prospect of conducting an internecine struggle of indefinite duration for the purpose of becoming the majority."

True to the spirit of his master Gokhale, Sastri was always prepared to serve by failure, if necessary, so that more fortunate men may serve in the future by their successes. It was in this spirit that Sastri went in April 1924 along with Mrs. Besant as a member of a political deputation to England. The object of the deputation was to agitate with the authorities and the statesmen in Britain for imme-

diate constitutional advance. Writing to a friend in April 1924 Sastri said :

“This time I go without enthusiasm, under a sense of duty Little can be done now in England: who knows, before we land there the present government may have fallen? Though too weak to have done anything, they would probably blame us for having tied up their hands.”

Sastri was in London from May 10 to July 31 working hard in spite of feeble health. Together with Mrs. Besant and others, he joined the deputation which presented a memorandum to the India Office making a demand for Dominion Home Rule. Sastri campaigned along with Mrs. Besant, making speeches at a series of meetings in various places. But Sastri was disappointed with the Labour Government's indifferent response. In a letter of May 22, 1924 Sastri wrote :

“To sum up the situation here: the Ministry has no big plan for India. It only wishes to tide over the difficulty somehow.”

On May 28, 1924 Sastri spoke to a very large and very distinguished audience at a reception given to the Indian delegation by the British Auxiliary. It was in this speech that Sastri condemned the extravagant increase in the salaries and allowances of the I.C.S., recommended by the Lee Commission (the “Lee Loot” as it came to be known) in such strong terms that Col. Joshua Wedgwood remarked that at the pace Mr. Sastri was going, he should soon become the first P.C. (Privy Councillor) to be imprisoned for sedition! On June 25, 1924 Sastri spoke with great effect, though only for 10 minutes, at a big demonstration in the Queen's Hall.

Sastri returned to India in the middle of August in poor health. The political climate in India was far from

encouraging. Mahatma Gandhi went on a twenty-one-day fast on account of his deep distress at the frequent Hindu-Muslim riots in the country. A Unity Conference was summoned in Delhi where Gandhiji was fasting, and the leaders of all the communities assembled together pledged themselves to noble resolves. Sastri, however, always held that pledges and resolves made in the stress of emotion and anxiety caused by the fast of a great and venerated soul would not be binding or lasting. Sastri wrote in an article in the *Servant of India* :

“No one who loves human nature or respects Indian national character will fail to be struck by the heroism and iron will of the Saint of Sabarmati, which, recalling in some aspects certain well-known episodes in the lives of Sri Rama and Bishma, lift the twenty-one days’ fast and penance to epic grandeur. But are people under stress of an emotion variously compounded of hero-worship, responsibility for a great life and morbid anxiety to reach memorable results within a prescribed time, likely to be the safest judges of differences that reach down to the foundations of culture and religion?”

During 1925, Sastri wrote a series of articles in the *Servant of India* pleading with the Britisher in India to summon the highest and the noblest elements in his character and tradition and to use his influence for solving the communal problem, and not for aggravating it. He also pleaded with the Indian political parties not to allow political hatred to mar social intercourse. Above all, he reiterated that co-operation and not non-co-operation was the right path to *Swaraj* and prosperity. He warned :

“We have in the extremity of despair actually inculcated a spirit of disobedience and direct action, which, while creating disorders and tumults and embarrassments now, is certain to recoil with terrible force on

our own heads and expose our Home-Rule regime, when it is established, to the serious risks of continued and chronic distemper."

To the Government, he kept on urging that reform and not repression was the wiser as well as the juster course. Unhappily, with the outbreak of some anarchical activity in Bengal, Government took fright and at the instance of Lord Lytton, the Governor of Bengal, the Viceroy passed the Bengal Ordinance, which was another edition of the Rowlatt Act. In Sastri's opinion, in some respects it was worse than the Rowlatt Act. Sastri was pained to see that Mrs. Besant, approved of the Bengal Ordinance and he wrote two letters to her early in November 1924 deploring her attitude. He was grieved that her views on the Bengal situation would affect the great efforts that she was then making to bring about political unity in the country. It was painful for Sastri to take a line different from Mrs. Besant, but with his characteristic outspokenness he told her what he felt. He received a chorus of praise from Congress circles on his article on the Bengal Ordinance. Satyamurti wrote to him :—

"Permit me to congratulate you most warmly and sincerely on your able, thoughtful and sympathetic article on the Bengal situation. I have read it most carefully and am very glad you have spoken out. I only wish you now rejoin the Congress. I need not urge any reasons, for you know them. I only desire to add that you are wanted in the Congress and that by ploughing your lonely furrow you are hardly doing justice to yourself."

It was in this period of indifferent health and comparative rest that Sastri undertook the arduous task of preparing and delivering the *Kamala Lectures* at the Calcutta University. The lectures had been founded by Sir Asutosh

Mookerjee in memory of his beloved daughter Kamala who died prematurely in 1923. Sir Asutosh had asked Dr. Annie Besant to be the first lecturer of this Endowment. It was his wish that Sastri should be the second to deliver these lectures, but Sir Asutosh died before he could actually invite him. When he learnt from his sons of their father's devout wish, Sastri who had the greatest admiration and affection for Sir Asutosh, accepted the invitation against medical advice. The lectures were actually delivered on four successive days beginning from February 23, 1926. Writing to his daughter of his first lecture, he says:

"I stood the ordeal well yesterday. I held forth for an hour and a quarter and at the top of my voice. The pain (in his heart) started ten minutes before the beginning and kept on for an hour after the end. I rested in an adjacent room to the Senate House for half an hour, and they actually carried me in a chair to the car."

Sir Nilratan Sircar and Dr. B. C. Roy were in constant attendance on him during the lectures. Though everybody trembled for Sastri, he warmed up and spoke with an array of facts, illumined by humour and enriched with emotion. Except for some quotations and factual documentation, he had no notes. Indeed it was a *tour de force* of long-sustained extempore speaking. Any summary of these lectures is bound to be unsatisfactory. They must be read and re-read in full. In free India their value is all the greater. For, they deal with the fundamentals of citizenship and show us the way of growing in it, and cherishing and guarding it. Sastri insists that rights flow from duties, and at the same time he wants every citizen to be well instructed in his rights and to be well prepared for defending them. But he cautions the law-breakers and says: "I recognise that there are situations in which one has the right to break the law, but please

remember that there are others less law-abiding than yourself who will use your precedent and make the extreme medicine of the Constitution its daily bread."

Commenting on these lectures, the *Guardian* of Calcutta wrote :

"Mr. Sastri was followed with rapt attention and, one can only say, deservedly. For, rarely does the opportunity come to most of us to listen to so polished an utterance of so mature a mind, so generous a lover of youth, so qualified a man of public affairs who looms large whichever the stage, whether academic or political or social, whether Indian or Imperial or International—shining, not through any adventitious aid or pose, but by the breadth of his knowledge of the world, by the scrupulosity of his fairness to foes and friends, and by the matchless poise of his judgement. Honoured by the University of Calcutta, welcomed to Government House, presented with an address by the Corporation, he ever remains true to his own deep devotion to Duty; through evil report and good report a genuine servant of India."

These lectures were according to the terms of the lectureship repeated at the Madras University from the 12th to the 15th March, 1926 to wondering and gaping audiences which increased with every successive lecture.

The Madras University presented him with a gold plate in appreciation of these lectures, installed an oil painting of Sastri in the University Hall and instituted a lectureship in his own name.

CHAPTER XI

SOUTH AFRICA

It was Srinivasa Sastri's destiny to continue the work of Gokhale and Gandhi on behalf of Indians in South Africa. As Gokhale's trusted lieutenant he had helped in the campaign in India to gather support, moral and financial, for the cause of Indians in South Africa. In December, 1913 he read the address of the Madras Mahajana Sabha to Lord Hardinge on that memorable occasion when the good Viceroy referred in feelingful terms to the suffering of "our compatriots in South Africa." In 1919 Lord Chelmsford proposed that Sastri should go to South Africa along with Sir Benjamin Robertson to watch the Indian case before the Lange Commission which General Smuts appointed as a result of a memorandum presented by Lord Sinha at the Imperial War Conference of 1918 on the disabilities of Indians in South Africa. Smuts put difficulties in the way of Sastri's joining the delegation. He told Lord Buxton, the Governor General of South Africa, that while the Union Government were anxious to receive Sastri equally with Sir Benjamin as a representative of the Government of India, and while they were prepared to treat him publicly and officially on precisely the same terms as Sir Benjamin, they could not guarantee that the same equality of treatment would be extended to him in private and social relations in South Africa. Lord Buxton conveyed this to Lord Chelmsford, and Sastri was duly informed of the South African Government's note of warning. After careful consideration Sastri decided not to join the delegation, since he did not consider it wise "for one who was to plead for the equality of his countrymen with other subjects of His Majesty to begin by admitting his own inferiority." Sastri's

decision was severely criticised by many in India and our countrymen in South Africa were deeply disappointed. Unfortunately, Sastri could not reveal at that time the correspondence between the two Governments as they were carried on through secret cables.

In an earlier chapter, an account has been given of Sastri's conflict with General Smuts at the Imperial Conference, Smuts's dissentient vote, so far as South Africa was concerned, to Sastri's resolution asking for equality of citizenship to Indians domiciled in the Dominions, and Smuts's refusal to invite Sastri to go to South Africa in his Dominion tour. At the next Imperial Conference of 1923 Smuts stiffened his attitude still further and went so far as to deny equality of citizenship in the Empire as a whole. Not being content with that, like the General that he was, he carried the war into the enemy's territory, and went on to say:

"Mr. Sastri by his mission and his speeches has undoubtedly made matters worse; he has, for instance, never failed whenever an opportunity presented itself to attack the Indian policy of South Africa and thereby has greatly exasperated public opinion in that Dominion, already very sensitive on this issue. In other Dominions he has made people alive to the issue—indeed he has largely created it. The claim he has everywhere vigorously pressed for equal franchise and rights for Indians over the whole Empire, has not only gone further than the local claims of the Indians themselves—but has tended to raise opposition in quarters where it did not exist before. It is because I foresaw this development that I did not invite Mr. Sastri to include South Africa in his tours."

From time to time anti-Indian feeling gained the upper hand in South Africa and there were attempts to

restrict Indian interests in regard to trade and ownership of land. In 1924 the Class Areas and Reservation Bill containing the much-abhorred policy of segregation was also introduced. Before the Bill could be passed the 'South African Party' Government led by General Smuts, then in power, had to resign. Unfortunately, the new Government of the Nationalist Party headed by General Hertzog reintroduced that Bill. In moving the Bill the Minister of the Interior, Dr. Malan, said "the Bill frankly starts from the general supposition that the Indian, as a race in this country, is an alien element in the population, and that no solution of this question will be acceptable to the country unless it results in a very considerable reduction of the Indian population in this country." It sounded like the death-knell to Indian interests in South Africa.

In this desperate predicament the Government of India decided to try negotiations and they sent out a deputation led by Mr. Paddison to make a first-hand study of the problem. Prior to the Paddison deputation, a deputation of the South African Indian Congress came to India to seek the assistance of the people and the Government of India. After the Paddison deputation a parliamentary deputation from South Africa made a return visit to India. As a result of these visits, the Government of the Union of the South Africa agreed not to proceed with the Bill pending a conference with the representatives of the Government of India.

The Indian delegation to South Africa consisted of Sir Muhammad Habibullah as leader, Mr. Geoffrey Corbett as deputy leader, Sir Pheroze Sethna, Sir d'Arcy Lindsay, Sir George Paddison and the Right Honourable Srinivasa Sastri as members. G. S. Bajpai, a distinguished member of the I.C.S. who was Sastri's secretary in his Dominion tours was secretary of the delegation. Considering Sastri's great gifts

and his unique standing in public life, he should have been the rightful leader of the delegation. With a humility all his own, he advised Sir Muhammad Habibullah, the member of the Viceroy's Executive Council in charge of the portfolio of the Indians Overseas to take upon himself the leadership of the delegation and to appoint a British member of the I.C.S. as deputy leader. Sastri was happy that Corbett, who had been his Secretary in 1922 at the Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armaments, was chosen as deputy leader of the delegation. It is needless to say that Sastri was easily the most distinguished member of the Habibullah deputation and that he established a great name for himself in South Africa during his brief visit as a member of the delegation even as he did in the other British Dominions as well as in Great Britain, Geneva and Washington.

The South African delegation consisted entirely of the members of the Hertzog Government and none from the opposition party led by Smuts. Dr. D. F. Malan, the Minister of the Interior, was elected Chairman of the Conference. General Hertzog, the Prime Minister of South Africa, opened the Conference on December 17, 1926 with a speech which struck a buoyant note. For, a great change had come over this statesman, who wanted South Africa to become a Republic, and he became mellowed and broadened in outlook after he had attended the Imperial Conference of 1926. Elated by his success at the Imperial Conference in which was formulated the Balfour Declaration recognizing the equality and independence of the Dominions on a par with Great Britain, Hertzog had returned home with a great enthusiasm for the empire and its ideals.

In the last week of February 1927, the terms of the settlement arrived at by the Round Table Conference at

Cape Town were announced to the Indian Legislative Assembly and Council of State. Briefly they were: Western standards of life should be maintained; Indians domiciled in South Africa who were prepared to conform to the Western standards should be enabled to do so; an 'uplift' programme should be organized for the benefit of the Indian settlers so that they might not lag behind any section of the community; a voluntary "assisted emigration scheme" of repatriation to India or any other country where Western standards were not required should be put into operation; the Areas Reservation and Immigration Bill should be dropped; an Agent General of the Government of India should be appointed in South Africa to secure effective co-operation between the two Governments.

The Cape Town Agreement was a remarkable achievement for both sides. Sastri felt that our countrymen in South Africa should get a hint of the unexpected success of the negotiations even before the settlement was officially announced. So he said at the farewell reception to the Indian delegation at Cape Town: "We leave Cape Town pleased with our labours and if Indians in South Africa will play the game, the future is full of hope." In a subsequent speech at Durban, Sastri was even more overt, and he declared: "A new era is dawning on the relations between South Africa and India." Indeed, the withdrawal of the Areas Reservation and Immigration Bill—which was described by Lord Olivier in the House of Lords as, more than a 'pressure', an 'oppression'—marked the birth of a new era for the Indians in South Africa. For the moment the miracle of inner conversion seemed to have come over the Government of South Africa. For, the very Dr. Malan who had earlier characterised the Indian community as "an alien element in the population", now declared:

"The Union Government firmly believe in and

adhere to the principle that it is the duty of every civilised Government to devise ways and means and to take all possible steps for the uplifting of every section of their permanent population to the full extent of their capacity and opportunities and accept the view that, in the provisions of educational and other facilities the considerable number of Indians who will remain part of the permanent population should not be allowed to lag behind other sections of the people."

When the question of the appointment of the first Agent General of the Government of India in South Africa came up, the unanimous choice of all concerned fell on Sastri. We have it on the authority of C. F. Andrews, that saintly man who, more than any other, by his work of healing and reconciliation made the Cape Town Agreement possible, that General Hertzog and Dr. Malan wanted very much to have Sastri as the first Agent General of India in their country. The South African Indians prayed for his coming. The Viceroy Lord Irwin was most keen that he should accept the appointment. But what clinched the issue for Sastri was Mahatma Gandhi's insistence that "he alone could successfully inaugurate the working of the Cape Town Agreement in bringing about which he had played not an inconsiderable part." On April 6, 1927 Mahatma Gandhi wrote to Sastri, "This is from a sick bed. I had hoped to see you in Bangalore and press my suit. But it cannot be for some time yet. I have no reply to my wire which I hope you did get. You will break the heart of Indians in South Africa if you do not go." He concluded the letter: "Lastly, there will be no fear of pin-pricks whilst Lord Irwin is Viceroy. He knows you so well. I urge you to reconsider your decision and go even if it is for a year. You alone can inaugurate the

working of the compact, you alone can set the tone." This letter settled the matter for Sastri and he agreed.

After a festival of farewells, Sastri left Bombay on June 8, 1927 and reached Delagoa Bay on June 27. Sastri used the three weeks of voyage to brood on his mission and go to the root of it. Talking to a select private audience after his return to India he said : "One is surprised at the amount of deep thinking which is possible in the presence of the blue." Sastri meditated profoundly on the nature of the task before him which in his judgement was of the greatest possible difficulty. It was nothing short of wining over a hostile people and converting them to love through love. Sastri was determined that his personality should not in any way add to the difficulty of his task. He resolved that he should be in every respect what an ambassador of the people of India should be. In his conduct, he was determined "to act up to the old requirements of her faith—traced to the deep and generous principles of patience and forbearance—generally speaking, 'do not return an angry word for an angry word, try to see the better side of things, and while', according to Barthruhari, 'being quite willing to dwell even in exaggerated language on the excellence of others, try if possible always to forget the wrong, never speak about it, especially if it happens to be anything said against yourself'."* Sastri, by his innate nobility and control over his emotions, was already one who had learnt to govern himself and practise large-heartedness and forbearance. In his mission in South Africa which was sure to be beset with exceptional difficulties, he determined to practise these virtues habitually and unerringly so that everyone would recognise in him the true representative of an ancient and Eastern civilisation. It was well that Sastri had these high resolves and that he could keep to them

*From an unpublished talk

with firmness. For, there was much in South Africa that provided abundant provocation which might have made lesser men lose their temper, and their mission, too. Sastri's code of conduct might well be a model for all ambassadors.

In South Africa the chief feature of all laws and regulations was, and is, racial discrimination. Cape Province, having been governed under the policy of Cecil Rhodes, imposed the least disabilities on Indians. In Transvaal where racial pride and intolerance were most aggressive Indians suffered the greatest disabilities. For, in that province coloured persons could not walk on foot-paths or use the tramway; there were coloured counters and white counters in post offices. The Gold Law and the Township Law prevented Indians from owning land or residing in the "Gold Area".

In Natal, the laws were not so harsh against the Indians as in Transvaal. Though the smallest in size, Natal had the largest Indian population. It was to this province that our countrymen went first as indentured labourers as far back as 1870. At that time Natal was practically a jungle, swampy and malarious. Indians slaved and contributed much to the building of this garden province. Here Indians were allowed to purchase land and own property, some even on a large scale. But there were discriminatory bye-laws against Indians in travelling on tramcars and trains. There was in actual practice, though not in law, discrimination in educational facilities available for Indian children.

With discrimination dogging our people in South Africa at every step, there could not be an atmosphere more hostile or formidable to the success of Sastri's mission. But the Cape Town Agreement held out a silver lining in the cloud and Sastri was determined to make a new approach to the problem and to try a new diplomacy. .

At the very start, there was the discouraging circumstance that Sastri had difficulties in obtaining accommodation in hotels. Very soon, these difficulties were overcome by the impact of his noble and striking personality, the splendour of his eloquence, and the sweetness and moderation of his views. In his very first speech in Pretoria he emphasized that the Agreement was a compromise which was 'the very soul of all political progress', and that neither party could afford to ignore the part which they considered unfavourable and concentrate upon the part which they considered favourable. He appealed to his countrymen to be guided in all their dealings by a strict regard for truth, fair play and good faith. At the Mayor's banquet at Johannesburg he alluded to the real change of mind and heart on the part of large sections of the European Community in South Africa towards their Indian co-citizens. With his characteristic ability to see the other man's point of view he recognised the difficulties of the European leaders in working for the spread of this change throughout the Dominion of South Africa. In a message addressed to the Europeans through the columns of the *Natal Witness* he said : "We plead for forbearance and charity, even where we do not command friendship and co-operation." In a speech to a crowded audience in Durban he gave a solemn assurance that he would "faithfully confine my vision to the four corners of the Agreement." Soon he was in great demand all over for his speeches. He made many friends. Among them were the Governor General Earl of Athlone, Prime Minister Hertzog, Hofmeyr and Malan, judges, bishops, editors, authors and the less known, but by him equally prized, citizens. To our own countrymen, notwithstanding some occasional grumbling from some of them against his moderation, he became a beloved and honoured patriarch.

Lionised as Sastri was, he was every day dealing with many problems, big and small, and not the smallest detail was too small for him. He set the utmost store by the 'uplift clause' of the Cape Town Agreement. He turned his attention first and foremost to education. The Cape Town Agreement had laid it down that the Union Government should recommend to the Natal Administration the appointment of a Commission of Enquiry into the condition of Indian education in Natal "which was admittedly grave." The Natal Government's pride was wounded that these words had found their way into the Agreement and that they had been prejudged even before the Enquiry Commission was appointed. In fact, the Natal Administration passed a resolution solemnly refusing to appoint the Education Commission. When Sastri went to see Dr. Malan about it, he threw up his hands in despair. He asked Sastri to prepare the ground by his speeches and also by meeting the rabid anti-Indians and trying to mollify them. He went to the Governor General, Earl of Athlone, who gave him every species of encouragement. He was good enough to arrange for a luncheon to which he invited the Administrator of Natal, Sir George Plowman. After lunch, the three of them sat apart and discussed the Indian question. The Governor General let Sir George please himself by a long monologue on many things he did and knew, and then tactfully led the conversation to the Education Commission, leaving Sastri to do the rest of the work. Amazingly enough, Sir George promised to persuade his Executive Council to appoint the Education Commission. Though in the intermediate stages various kinds of difficulties presented themselves, the Commission was announced on September 22, 1927 as a birthday gift to Sastri. There was bitter disappointment, however, when the personnel of the Commission was announced later,

containing only two members of the Natal Executive Council and two members of the Natal Provincial Council. The only relieving feature was that two educational experts from India assisted the Commission of Enquiry—Dr. Kitchlu and Miss Gordon. They did hard and bold work and established the fact that the Natal Administration had made no contribution to Indian education and that furthermore they had diverted towards European education part of the Union Government's subsidy for Indian education.

One of the conclusions of the Commission was that in future all money earned as central subsidy on Indian education by Natal should be allocated wholly for this purpose. The result of the recommendation was that Indian education expanded rapidly. Sastri was keen that the self-help of the Indian community should be evoked to the fullest extent. He, therefore, appealed to Indians to subscribe about 20,000 pounds to build a college and a hostel. The response was handsome. But there was difficulty in securing a site for the college which was overcome only by Sastri's personal approach to the civic authorities. The Metropolitan of India, Fosse Westcott, who was at the time on a tour of South Africa, wrote to Sastri before leaving that country : "I was amused to hear that you have caused a new word to be coined which has not yet perhaps found its way into any English dictionary, but it will no doubt do so in due course. Some one, in speaking of the Registrar or town clerk of this City (Durban) and his insistence that no decision about the site for which you have applied for the training school should be arrived at till you yourself had seen them again said that he had been completely 'Sastricised'. The operation is eminently beneficial and I hope you will have health and strength to perform it on all those whom you meet." On August 24, 1928 the Administrator of Natal, Sir George Plowman, laid the foundation stone of the

“Sastri College.” The attendance of Europeans at this function was both large and distinguished. The college was opened by the Governor General Earl of Althlone when the project was completed in 1929, sometime after Sastri's return to India.

Sastri did much constructive work among our people to improve literacy and education, health and sanitation, and to lift the status of women. He started a Social Service League and a Child Welfare Association. He constantly pleaded for better sanitation and higher standards of living. He appealed to our wealthy men to endow schools and hospitals, and generally to contribute to the welfare of their poorer brethren.

Sastri had to be always on the alert to protect the interests of our people. For, they were living as it were on the slopes of a volcano and a sudden eruption of racial feeling might break out at any time and shake the foundations of our people's very existence. Even though the assisted emigration scheme worked remarkably well and the number of people who returned to India was considerable, the question of condonation of those who had made illicit entry in the past into the Union offered the greatest difficulty to the Agent General. The question bristled with difficulties of a technical kind—the results of a history of alternate enforcement and neglect of laws regarding immigration, registration and domicile which varied in each province. It also gave rise to acute differences of opinion in the Indian community, threatening almost to disrupt it. At last, the question was settled satisfactorily, when as an act of grace for the esteemed presence of Sastri in South Africa, Dr. Malan promised condonation to all Indians who had entered the Union of South Africa illicitly and who made a confession to that effect on or before October 28, 1928.

Another difficulty that came up suddenly was the Liquor Bill, prohibiting Indians from working as barmen, which the Minister of Justice Tielman Roos, brought in a vicious mood. Sastri, after trying all his resources of negotiation at various levels, had to seek Prime Minister Hertzog's help and with his influence behind him, met Tielman Roos himself and won him over to the extent of his consenting to drop the clause in the bill that threatened to throw numerous Indians out of employment.

Sastri had to deal with racial discrimination in regard to ownership of land and trading opportunities. But he always realised that any action far in advance of the opinion of the Whites would fail. So he made flank, rather than frontal, attacks. He did not scorn small victories, and in his wisdom, he recognised that the accumulated effect of many small victories would amount to a big victory. His one constant and continuous approach was to create better relations between the Indians and the Whites which had been marred for decades by a fundamental ill-feeling born of racial animosity. Sastri made up his mind that unless this problem was attacked slowly, patiently, and from several angles, a deep and strong foundation for better and lasting understanding could not be laid. His eloquent speeches, for which he was in great demand all over South Africa, his lectures on Indian culture and philosophy to spell-bound audiences, his lay sermons from the pulpits which were vacated for him for the moment by admiring bishops, his lavish entertainments and warm-hearted hospitality—were all directed towards this central objective of creating better understanding and better relationship between the Indians and the South African Whites. He formed Indo-European Councils with very influential Europeans—judges, bishops, editors, members of parliament, etc.,—in order to bring together the more progressive mem-

bers of both communities and through discussions to arrive at ways and means of alleviating difficulties and solving particular problems. He tried to win the sympathy of the European community in all possible ways. One act of his, the presentation of a baby elephant to the zoo, a gift of the Maharaja of Mysore, greatly pleased the public of Durban.

On the 21st February, 1928 Sastri celebrated the first Anniversary of the Cape Town Agreement by holding a reception at Mount Nelson Hotel, Cape Town. Sastri personally invited General Smuts for the celebration, but he declined and got into a long altercation with Sastri about the move in India to boycott the Simon Commission. Mr. Patrick Duncan of Smuts's 'South African Party', however, attended the celebration, thus helping to keep the Cape Town Agreement above party politics. Sastri made a brief speech praising General Hertzog and Dr. Malan for the great part they had played in shaping the Agreement. He said "The whole credit goes to the present Government of South Africa, and I take this opportunity of saying so. I must say how much my people and my countrymen appreciate, and how I appreciate the courage and the high magnanimity with which they came to conclusions, in some respects the very opposite to those they originally held." Prime Minister Hertzog, with characteristic candour and sincerity said : "I wish you to take this from me, that this agreement, which has been entered into and is undoubtedly appreciated by me and by my friends, has brought about a feeling between the two countries which is going to last." Dr. Malan paid a striking and magnificent tribute to Sastri :

"The agreement concluded has been lauded from various points of view, but not so far from the point of view that it has brought Mr. Sastri to the country. He is not only a man of world-wide reputation, but he is a man who deserves that reputation, not only on

account of his accomplishments—of what he has done—but also, and chiefly, on account of what he personally is. He is one of the most outstanding examples in the world of personal self-sacrificing devotion to high personal and patriotic ideals. His presence in the country—which means that South Africa is in a position today to make the personal acquaintance of a most illustrious representative of the Indian nation—is of the utmost value to the two nations. It is of the utmost value to India that one of her most illustrious sons should come to stay in South Africa and learn to sympathise with us in our difficulties and come in time even to love our own fatherland.”

Patrick Duncan, in his turn, paid a handsome tribute to Sastri and said that his coming had opened the eyes of people in South Africa to what Indian culture really meant. General Smuts, however, could not help making it a party issue. For, some months later, he made a public attack on the Indian policy of the Hertzog Government but he, too, paid a high tribute to Sastri :

“They have even an Ambassador here in the person of Mr. Sastri. He (Smuts) had felt Sastri’s steel at the Imperial Conference in 1921. He was not surprised that Mr. Sastri proved too clever for the Government of Hertzog. Mr. Sastri was probably the most honoured man in South Africa. When any important function was held or any important lecture given, Mr. Sastri was invited. It was right too; he was one of the ablest speakers and one of the cleverest men.”

As the one year of Sastri’s term as Agent General was nearing completion, the Indian community sent urgent letters to Mahatma Gandhi praying him to implore Sastri to stay on. On February 26, 1928 Gandhi wrote to Sastri :

“They say you are already counting your months.

And they are trembling in their shoes, and more than they am I trembling, and perhaps my trembling is weightier because of the absence of shoes. For, I really feel that except for grave reasons of health it would be a national tragedy for you to leave South Africa at the present moment. And I am sorry to have to say—but it is true—that no one else can successfully replace you at the present moment. The familiarity that your stay in South Africa might have produced has certainly not bred contempt; on the contrary it has gained greater respect for you from those whose respect counts for the work. And just as you have gained influence amongst the Europeans, you have gained staunch adherents amongst our own countrymen. You may not desert them.”

Gandhi's word prevailed; Sastri stayed on for another six months. He pursued more vigorously than ever his mission of reconciliation, travelled extensively and brought vast audiences under the spell of his oratory. South Africa bowed to the magic wand of Sastri. Not that there were no instances of hostility. For, the unique homage that Sastri won infuriated some vile anti-Asiatics who attempted to break his meetings; but the composure and magnanimity with which Sastri faced hostility at his meetings only enhanced his reputation and influence. His noble bearing had even a converting effect. On one occasion, a rude and persistent interrupter turned up at the end of his meeting, and apologized for his misbehaviour with tears in his eyes and a sob in his voice. There was also the incident at Klerksdrop where at a meeting presided over by the Mayor, the rabid anti-Indian Deputy Mayor and his friends caused trouble, put out the lights, and burst a stink bomb. As though nothing had happened Sastri invited his audience to come out from the hall into the open air and said smilingly,

"I was going to speak when we changed our venue (laughter) upon another phase of the Agreement." Sastri's dignified and unperturbed behaviour won universal admiration. The Mayor apologized to Sastri and regretted that one of the foremost townsmen had taken part in the disturbances. The Government of South Africa took the unprecedented step of offering their apologies over the incident to the Government of India. Sastri, however, cabled to the Government of India to ignore the incident. For, it was always in his nature to forgive and forget.

It will be no exaggeration to say that South Africa treated Sastri as a sage, a master and teacher. Professor Bell's appreciation of Sastri's lectures on Indian Philosophy, in itself a literary masterpiece, speaks of the wonderful manner in which Sastri transformed a lecture on philosophy into a thing of wonderful emotional beauty, a beautiful work of art. He commented :

"It would, indeed, seem that in the Indian mind, if Sastri's mind is typical, Philosophy, Religion and Art are still parts of one great synthesis, as they were indeed in Ancient Greece, and as unfortunately they have ceased to be in Western Europe."

Mahatma Gandhi, who reprinted Professor Bell's tribute in the *Young India*, said "These lectures are perhaps his greatest and most permanent contribution to the Indian cause in South Africa."

The Press of South Africa broke out in a chorus of farewell tributes. The *Natal Witness* said : "It is not too much to say that he (Sastri) is one of the world's few statesmen."

The *Cape Times* wrote :

"He (Sastri) is among the greatest living speakers in the English tongue, a natural orator, with a most effective delivery. Slowly, with a sure choice of words,

his speeches drop upon the ear, each sentence verbally perfect. ** ** ** Cape Town will remember for many years how his addresses in the University Hall drew great audiences to listen to him and come away lost in admiration of his speaking. These gifts have, of course, been the foundation of the immense popular impression that he has made in South Africa..... South Africans in authority have learnt to have confidence in Mr. Sastri. They know that his word is trustworthy. They admire his intellectual gifts. They have come to appreciate his simplicity and charm as a man. They have shared the glamour of his sense of humour; simple in essence, strangely complex and subtle in grain."

The *Rand Daily Mail* wrote :

"Mr. Sastri's stay amongst us has been a great intellectual and moral stimulus to the South African Community, and for that as well as for his great personal charm and distinguished statesmanship he will always be remembered with affection, not only by those who enjoyed the privilege of his friendship but also by all who had the happy experience of hearing or reading those remarkable speeches of his which afforded so many vivid glimpses of a mind which is a veritable store-house of learning."

The *Natal Advertiser* paid a singular tribute :

"There was the brilliant reign—for one can justly call it a reign—of Mr. Sastri. Governments as a rule and least of all British Governments, do not do inspired things. Yet, the choice of Mr. Sastri as the first Agent in the Union was as nearly a stroke of genius as anything may be..... It would be easy to lapse into eulogy over Mr. Sastri, though it would be difficult to praise him above his worth. Yet this remains true, that during his stay in the Union he is, without question, the

greatest man in South Africa, the ablest orator, the shrewdest diplomat, and withal, the most accomplished interpreter of the civilisation of India that we have ever had in our midst."

The *Pretoria News* observed :

"It is a curious thing that the two best English speakers we have in South Africa are not Englishmen—one is a Dutchman, Hofmeyr, and the other is an Indian, Sastri.....Hofmeyr has the easier style—he is fast and free, while Mr. Sastri is slow and deliberate; but Mr. Sastri has the Asquithian gift of compression which goes along with the choice of the inevitable word."

When it was known that Sastri had decided to return to India at the end of his extended stay of six months, Sir Muhammad Habibullah wished that Sastri should be honoured in a suitable way and sounded him privately if he would be agreeable to receiving the K.C.S.I. Sastri declined it most respectfully and wrote in his letter dated November 30, 1928:

"Believe me, the approbation of friends, especially the Viceroy and yourself, is ample reward for such services as I have been privileged to do. I recognise the very high distinction proposed for me but I cannot overcome the feeling that it is somewhat out of the range of one who occupies a humble station in life. In communicating my wish to remain undistinguished, may I beg respectfully that my motive be not misunderstood?"

In the final months of his stay Sastri consolidated the gains of his work for the Indian community, and it was a tranquil period of unity among Indians and peace and friendliness in the relations between the European and Indian communities when Sastri sailed homewards in

January 1929, leaving the precious memory of his great ambassadorship.

Hofmeyr, himself one of the finest statesmen and greatest orators of South Africa, has enshrined in memorable words the memory of Srinivasa Sastri's ambassadorship :

"To the Europeans of our land his sojourn in our midst meant perhaps more than anything else the presentation of a new conception of India and its people. He became to us the interpreter of India—an India of which, to our shame be it said, we used to know all too little; or, where we knew of it, we allowed, all too readily, our remembrance of it to be obscured.

"He revealed to us an India of an ancient civilisation, one of the great civilisations of the world, a civilisation which has made many important contributions to our modern life; an India of a serene philosophy, a wide culture, and a developed art; an India with a literature well worthy to be numbered among the great literatures of the world. Of that India we did not know before Mr. Sastri came among us—or, if we knew of it, we did not often think of it. He made it real to us, and against the background which he thus created he made it possible for us to see what we have called our 'Indian problem' in a different way. Sastri as her interpreter to South Africa. But Mr.

"Fortunate indeed was India when she sent Mr. Sastri did more than reveal India to South Africa. He also, in his own inimitable way, did much to reveal us to ourselves, helping us to see—no less effectively because of the kindly inoffensiveness of the method—some of those things wherein we are in danger as a nation of falling short of those high principles to which we owe allegiance."

CHAPTER XII

KENYA LOST AGAIN

A few months before returning to India from South Africa, Sastri wrote to Mahatma Gandhi :

“I am very anxious to return. Yet I am under no delusion. I am not wanted there, while I am wanted here. Still my state of mind is extraordinary. Usually I don't trouble you with my troubles. But pardon my egotism this once. Used these many years to be in the minority, to be misunderstood and abused, I feel like fish out of water in this atmosphere of adulation and popularity. Something must be wrong at the very root, this is all unreal, the prelude to some catastrophe. So says the element of prudence and caution in me. I am impelled to seek betimes the safety of my natural environment (hot water) and betake myself to my usual occupation (ploughing the sands of the sea).”

Sastri's dim foreboding of evil to come proved truer than he could have thought. For, his South African triumph was immediately followed by a second bitter failure over Kenya.

Soon after his return from South Africa, Sastri accepted the Vice-Chancellorship of Annamalai University which his devoted friend and admirer, the munificent Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar, had newly founded. But almost as soon as he had accepted it, he had to give it up in order to go to Kenya as the Government of India's representative to hold a watching brief for the Kenya Indians in connection with the visit of Sir Samuel Wilson, the permanent Under-Secretary of State for colonies to discuss the implementation of the proposals for closer union of Kenya, Uganda and

Tanganyika recommended by the Hilton-Young Commission. The Commission had proposed the establishment of a Common Roll, and a 'civilisation franchise', but made it conditional on the consent of the European community. Sastri undertook the mission to Kenya on the understanding that he should be free to work for the Common Roll. Unfortunately Sir Samuel Wilson had been secretly advised by Col. Amery, the Secretary of State for Colonies, not to discuss the Common Roll. In a long letter to Mahatma Gandhi dated 27th July, 1929, Sastri wrote fully of the peculiar difficulties of his mission in Kenya:

"When I left in May last, it was on the understanding that I should be free to work for the Common Roll. If Col. Amery had already instructed his Agent Sir Samuel Wilson to announce his decision against it, he should have cancelled the instruction. Apparently he did not. Wilson communicated the abandonment of the Common Roll in confidence to the Europeans before he did so to the Indians. Probably he wished to put the former in good humour for his negotiations with them. But the Indian community felt they had been allowed to flounder in the dark as regards their dearest ambition.

I may impart it as a secret to you that as soon as the Government of India knew of this from me, they drew the attention of the India Office to the false position in which Amery's action (or failure) had placed them."

But Sastri's position was not a bit eased, in spite of the Government of India's protest. The Europeans were adamant that their franchise must be communal and that a start must be made towards their responsible Government. The Indians were equally adamant that the Common Roll was the indispensable preliminary to any negotiations with

them. It was a difficult task, almost an impossible one, that Sastri had. The attitude of the Indian community to him was anything but helpful. Sastri wrote to Mahatma Gandhi:

“As if to make a difficult task impossible, the Indian community from the beginning suspected me. Several times I dispelled their misgivings and got their confidence. But my success was apparent only. Grounds of suspicion : I was a moderate and a Servant of India. I was an emissary of the Government of India.

“.....These suspicions were confirmed when I spoke of a ‘give and take’ policy and advised entry into the legislature and local bodies. Give and take ! They asked what was there to give ? Everything had been given that could be given. No more concession or compromise ! As to entering the legislature, etc., they had resolved to do so only on a common franchise. Till then their only policy was NCO (non-co-operation).

“More offence was discovered in my speeches. But I won’t trouble you with the smaller counts. Both in Nairobi and in Mombassa I was put on my defence. It was humiliating. But thanks to my patience and disposition, I ended in both places by gaining acquittal. This was a negative benefit, though I never enjoyed the confidence or the backing of our countrymen. I felt this much and suffered inwardly. This is my confession to you. Not much would have been observed in my behaviour.”

Sastri interviewed the Europeans, including Lord Delamere, the foremost champion of white supremacy. They were nice and courteous and, on the whole, frank. But Amery’s stab in the dark left no scope for any real negotiation. Sastri, however, made several speeches, in spite of ill-health, appealing to the Europeans to stretch the

hand of amity and friendship, and imploring the Indian brethren to follow the path of honourable compromise. But he was speaking to people who had made up their minds irrevocably. A passage from a speech of his at Mombassa to the Indians is worth quoting here :

“Now, I do not see, my friends, speaking to you with the utmost confidence, I do not see, how we can hope to get results at all in this task unless in stating our case we are fair to the other side, we are reasonable and we are moderate. Moderation has been brought up against me as one of my chief deficiencies. I have been attacked in a Kenya paper as a moderate in Indian politics. I am going to plead guilty; I am going shamelessly to avow my moderation.....

“Now I am told that in Mombassa there are a good many people who, if moderation were a crime, would have to stand in the dock with me. To these fellow criminals of mine I would make an appeal : Don't for goodness' sake. hide your heads in shame. Come out and own up fully that you are moderates and are not ashamed of being moderates for, while public questions have reached a point of difficulty, believe me, that just then it is for the moderates to cope with themOnly by moderation, by reason, and fairness in the heart will public questions be settled to the satisfaction of the community.”

In his letter to Mahatma Gandhi Sastri had said : “Believe me I have no ill-feeling against our people in Kenya. I am quite willing and glad to serve them whenever occasion should arise.” An occasion presented itself soon enough. In 1931, Sastri was deputed by the Government of India to give evidence before the Joint Select Committee of both Houses of the British Parliament appointed to consider the British Government's proposals concerning

East Africa. Sastri's evidence was bold and challenging and stressed the fact that the status of Indians overseas was still far from satisfactory, they still being relegated to a position of inferiority to the Whites. The Joint Select Committee's Report however, went against the Common Roll and equality of representation between the Indians and Europeans. Sastri had again to swallow the bitter pill of colour bar and white domination. Again Kenya broke Sastri's health, but he was not so wounded in spirit as before. He had nearly attained the unshakable equanimity enunciated in the *Gita*.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FIRST ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

SRINIVASA Sastri was already in London as a member of the Royal Commission on Indian Labour headed by the Rt. Hon'ble J. H. Whitley when the Indian Round Table Conference was mooted. Consequent upon the appointment of the All-British Simon Commission, which was boycotted by all parties in India including the Liberals, confidence in the British Government's sincerity to promote constitutional advance in India and to confer on her Dominion Status had become shaken amongst all parties in India.

The new Viceroy, Lord Irwin, a saintly man with a human and humane outlook on life and with a pronounced passion for peace and reconciliation, felt that the paramount need of the hour was to establish friendly contacts with Indian leaders including Mahatma Gandhi 'the non-co-operator', and to re-create Indian goodwill and to regain Indian confidence in British sincerity. Lord Irwin suggested to the Labour Government, which had then been voted to power, two statesmanlike steps to bring a new buoyancy into the Indian political scene which had been depressed by acute controversy and conflict by the cautious and aloof legalism of Lord Reading. When Irwin went to London on leave in the summer of 1929, he put both the proposals to Wedgwood Benn, the new Secretary of State. Benn was disposed to agree, but he was anxious that Lord Simon's blessings should be obtained in advance in some way lest he should be aggrieved that the new proposals were formulated behind his back. Simon who was at first ready to accept the statement on Dominion Status finally opposed it. He

agreed, however, to the proposal of a Round Table Conference and fell in with a tactical plan of an exchange of letters between him and the Prime Minister by which the Conference would emerge as an idea put fourth by the Commission to the Government.

The bulk of the Liberals and the Conservatives were opposed to Irwin's idea of a statement that the goal of India's political progress was Dominion Status. Baldwin, however, supported Irwin and this led to a long and decisive rift between Baldwin and Churchill. MacDonald ignored the opposition and a statement was made in an official communique in the *Indian Gazette* on October 31, 1929, soon after Irwin's return to India from his discussions in London. After a reference to the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms the governing sentence of the Viceroy's statement ran :

"In view of the doubts which have been expressed both in Great Britain and in India regarding the interpretation to be placed on the intentions of the British Government in enacting the statute of 1919, I am authorised on behalf of His Majesty's Government to state clearly that in their judgment it is implicit in the declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress as there contemplated is the attainment of Dominion Status."

Before issuing the statement, Irwin had carefully prepared the ground by personal interviews with the chief political leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi. His statement was very well received in India and for once the feeling was that Irwin had broken the bane of Britain's Indian policy, "so often giving too little and giving it too late," (to use Irwin's own words*), and that Government had moved in time. There was, however, a violent political

*"Fulness of Days"—The Earl of Halifax—(Collins) P. 119

explosion in the British Parliament over Irwin's statement which reacted adversely on Indian opinion and nullified to a large extent the satisfaction which the Viceroy's statement had given. The attitude of some of the well-known public men of Britain, Lloyd George, Birkenhead, Austen Chamberlain, Churchill and Reading infuriated even the right wing leaders of the Congress and strengthened their demand for complete independence. Within two months of Irwin's declaration regarding Dominion Status, Independence was declared as the political goal at the Lahore Congress (December, 1929). Non-co-operation by the Congress with the Round Table Conference which was to be held in London was also decided upon. This was followed by the "Salt Satyagraha" and Mahatma Gandhi's march to Dandi to manufacture salt illegally and court arrest. He was arrested on April 5, 1930. Salt Satyagraha took place all over the country leading to repression and imprisonment on a wide scale. The Indian Liberals were most anxious that the Government should announce the terms of the Round Table Conference and do everything in their power to induce Gandhi and the Congress to co-operate with the Round Table Conference. Sastri, who was then in England, urged the release of Gandhi and other political prisoners with a view to arriving at a settlement with the Congress. Sapru and Jayakar tried to mediate between Irwin and Gandhi. But they did not succeed and the First Round Table Conference had to be conducted without Gandhi or any other representative of the Congress.

While working in England on the Indian Labour Commission in the earlier months of 1930, Sastri worked hard through the press and the platform to repudiate the proposals of the Simon Commission and to educate public opinion in England on the paramount need of conciliating the Congress and conferring Dominion Status on India. His

main objection to the Simon proposals was that they barred the way to India's attainment of Dominion Status. In his paper at the East India Association, London, Sastri pointed out, "However much the meaning of Dominion Status may be changing, one aspect of it has for some years been accepted, not only as essential, but as forming the very bond and cement of the commonwealth, viz., the right of secession." Sastri's remarks drew wide attention and the die-hards used his reference to the right of secession as a weapon in their opposition to Dominion Status for India. The King who held Srinivasa Sastri in high esteem read Sastri's speech and was obviously concerned about it. In a letter to his brother (July 25, 1930) Sastri writes :

"At the Garden Party yesterday, I was presented to their Majesties with many others. The King said, 'I have been reading your recent speech.' He meant my paper to the East India Association on the Simon Report. He couldn't have been pleased."

Sastri was able to gather influential support in favour of Dominion Status. His speech to a large group of members of the House of Commons was well received. He was also able to win the powerful *Manchester Guardian* to the full support of Dominion Status. In a letter dated May 29, 1930 he wrote: "The R.T.C. is our only hope. If we pretend to despise it in advance or make a hash of it here, we are done for a long time." Still he was cautious in accepting a seat on the R.T.C. Immediately after accepting the membership he wrote to his dear friend Venkatarama Sastri: "We must fear the worst hereafter. My stock will fall below par in no time. Fame will play its usual trick. It is giddy while it lasts. The moderate's trial is imminent."

A week later he wrote to his brother: "The Conference is going to try Indian statesmanship, the patience of the delegates and my strength. It is hope against tremendous

odds." On October 15, 1930, he wrote to a friend, "I am no more hopeful of the R.T.C. than you are. But one has got to go through it as though one had full faith. That is the inner meaning of Gokhale's teaching: 'We must serve through our failures, more fortunate people may serve through their success.'" He added in the same letter: "And you err to think the worst enemy of India is the British die-hard. There is not much to choose between him and the Indian sectarian."

With the convening of the Indian Round Table Conference the Simon-child was practically abandoned. Sir John was not even a member of the Conference. The Round Table Conference was inaugurated by King George V on November 12, 1930 in St. James's Palace. After His Majesty had withdrawn, Sastri made a felicitous speech emphasising the unique nature of the occasion and the opportunity before the Conference. He said:

"The Crown is the symbol both of power and of unity and draws our hearts in willing homage and reverence. It is more. It is the fountain of justice, freedom and equality among the various peoples of the Commonwealth. Loyalty, therefore, enjoins the faithful and unceasing pursuit of these ideals and we should be failing in our duty to the Crown if we knowingly tolerated, anywhere under the British flag, conditions that produced injustice, inequality or undue restrictions on the growth of communities. This Conference will enable all the parties interested in India to bring together their ideas on the subject of her constitutional and peaceful advance to the fulfilment of her destiny. Bold and candid speech is required, but also moderation, forbearance and readiness to appreciate differing views. Above all the vision of India as a whole must shine brightly in our hearts and her

strength and prosperity must be the sovereign consideration governing all our plans. You will hear, Sir, many claims and counsels, and some of them may be in partial conflict. Our united prayer is that somehow, through the magic of your personality, these discordant claims will be reconciled and these fragmentary counsels may be gathered into one complete scheme so that this table, whatever its exact physical shape, may be hereafter remembered in history as the table of rounded wisdom and statesmanship."

Wedgwood Benn, the Secretary of State, had not prepared any detailed agenda for the Conference, possibly because he wanted to give a free play to Indian initiative. Sastri, who had a very private lunch with Benn wrote in a letter of Nov. 13, 1930;

"He seemed lacking in ideas and has no big plan of his own. He merely drifts and says he leaves things to us and the Conference in general. With our disorganisation this is not a promising attitude. I had to be content therefore with giving him my ideas and advice. The safe thing appears to me to be to keep no reserve but speak out freely so long as Benn is sincere and friendly. Pity he is not of Montagu's calibre."

When the principal Indian delegates to the R.T.C. sailed from Bombay a 'sea-change' had come over them. They had practically arrived at a unanimous decision in favour of a federal set-up for India. Sir Samuel Hoare, who was then a Conservative delegate of the Conference and who later became the Secretary of State for India and continued the work of the R.T.C., has commented on this phenomenon:

"A complete change had come over the picture during the delegates' voyage from India to England. Someone, no one knew exactly who it was, had started

the idea of an All-India Federation, not as a shadowy ideal, but as the basis of an Indian constitution to be established at once. Liberals, Princes, Hindus, Moslems, Sikhs, Untouchables, were irresistibly swept along in the tide, and when they arrived in London they left us in no doubt that the Simon plan of provincial autonomy, however wise in theory, was impracticable without some measure of responsibility at the Centre.”*

Soon after the arrival of these delegates Sastri interviewed them in twos and threes. He wrote to his brother on October 24, 1930:

“Sapru and Jayakar appear to have had preliminary talks with the Muhammadans and speak in confident tones of settlement—of course, after yielding nearly the whole demand. What else is possible? The Princes, too, seem to have talked them round. Though Hydari, Mirza, Haksar and others all pull in different ways, they all want federation and connexion with the Crown. I fear federation will win. If the principal author** of the Nehru Constitution swallows it what chance have we? You may take it, if there is agreement, it will be by surrendering to the Princes and Muhammadans. But there is still some prospect in that event, of getting far towards Dominion Status. But I won't be sure of anything’.”

Sir Tej Bhadur Sapru and Col. Haksar, who worked hard to promote the idea of Federation, soon realized that Srinivasa Sastri held the key to the British Indian attitude to Federation. He was one of the elder statesmen of India

*Nine Troubled Years.—Viscount Templewood (Collins) Pp. 47.

**An All-Parties Conference held in May 1928 appointed a committee under the Chairmanship of Pandit Motilal Nehru to consider and determine the principles of a constitution for India. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru took a prominent part in drafting this Constitution.

who was universally respected for the integrity of his character and the soundness of his judgment. He had his definite views on the Indian princely states, and had more than once pronounced that the majority of them had no right to exist. It was his apprehension that Federation which brought into it the numerous princely states with their irresponsible governments side by side with the provinces of British India with their responsible governments might weaken the Central Government and prevent India from acting as a real self-governing Dominion. It was feared that Sastri's opposition to Federation would wreck the scheme even before it had a chance of being discussed. So, Sapru and Haksar bent their energies to win Sastri over to Federation.

Sastri himself was carefully considering the pros and cons of the question. He tried to probe into the mystery of the attitude of the Princes towards Federation. Indeed, in the beginning he was sceptical and even suspicious of them. But with a consciousness of liability to err which ran in Sastri's noble mind along with his earnestness of conviction he kept an open mind, interviewed a good number of the Princely order and tried to understand them. He found in the Princes real patriotism and a genuine love of India as a whole apart from their own particular interests. Moreover, the Princes saw that entry into Federation will open a way for them to shake off the irksome yoke of the British paramountcy and to free themselves from the daily dread of British Political Officers. Sastri conceived high esteem especially for the Maharaja of Bikaner for his patriotism, his courage, and indomitable energy and capacity for organization. He came also to know and appreciate the significant part which Col. Haksar had played in the daily discussions among the Princes.

Sastri was slowly, if reluctantly, moving towards Federation. Sardar K. M. Panikkar has given us a vivid and brilliant account* of his final conversion to Federation:

“Mr. Sastri had gone for a rest cure to Bexhill, and was expected to arrive on the 23rd October in London. I was asked by Col. Haksar to meet him at the station and bring him to lunch at the Savoy Hotel. I met him and he welcomed me most warmly. I spirited him off promptly to the hotel where col. Haksar, Sir Manubhai and Sir Tej Bhadur Sapru were waiting for him. Then the campaign opened. An unceasing fire of questions and arguments were directed from all quarters against him. Col. Haksar discoursed on the stabilising value of the States; Sir Tej on the tactical advantages in the claim for central responsibility; Sir Manubhai on the iniquity of leaving the States out in any scheme of devolution of power from Britain to India. Sastri quietly sat and listened with eyes that seemed to look far away into eternity. Occasionally, he put a question which seemed to nonplus his friends, more often he merely grunted. The arguments were gone through over and over again, but the Buddha-like face of the old Brahmin showed no signs of change. Illumination was still to come. But from casual words it was clear to us that Mara was tempting him. It was about a quarter to four when we all got up. ‘I must think about it’ said Mr. Sastri, ‘I am not at all convinced’. We knew, however, that half the battle was over. Col. Haksar and his friends pressed the advantage thus gained with the result that at the opening session of the Conference we heard from Mr. Sastri himself the historic phrase ‘I confess I am converted to the idea of an All-India Federation’.”

*Memorable Days and Scenes-an article published in “The Twentieth Century”, November-December 1945 p.—51.

Another decisive moment of the Conference was when Lord Reading, ex-Viceroy and influential elder statesman, dreaded by Indian delegates as a formidable reactionary, threw a surprise and proclaimed, with the authentic ring of liberalism, his conversion to Dominion Status and responsibility at the Centre. It was an admirable speech he made and it turned the current of the Conference with regard to Dominion Status even as Sastri's announcement turned the current with regard to Federation. Sastri was anxious that both ideas should prosper side by side and gain strength quickly. In his speech at the Conference on 20th November, 1930 he uttered a word of caution and hoped that "nothing will be done on the side of those who care for Federation more than for Dominion Status to weaken the latter just as nothing should be done on the side of those who care for Dominion Status more than Federation to weaken Federation." In the same speech he went on to refer to the fear which some British politicians had that any power resulting from the constitutional advances recommended by the R.T.C. would pass into the hands of the Indian National Congress and that therefore a large constitutional advance should not be made. Dispelling this fear Sastri said:

"Much has been said by my friends who spoke on this side about the very large and considerable sections of the population whom Congress propaganda has not touched so far, who remain loyal to the British connection and who may be trusted, when there is serious danger, to stand by the British flag at all costs. May I add another source of comfort—and in saying this I shall, perhaps, strike a note out of the lines of orthodox defence of politics? Prime Minister, who are these people from whom we fear disturbance? No doubt they have caused trouble so far. Are our measures here not designed to conciliate them? Are they not calculated

to win over once more their hearts to the ways of loyalty and ordered progress? Believe me, they are not hereditary criminals; they are not savage barbarian hordes; they are not the sworn enemies of Great Britain or of British institutions. They are men of culture, men of honour, most of them, men who have made their mark in the professions. They are our kinsmen both in spirit and by blood. It is a sense of political grievance that has placed them in this position, which we view with so much distrust and so much disapprobation. Remove that discontent and you will find them alongside you, working the new constitution that we shall frame to its highest issues and drawing from those new institutions that we frame all the benefit of which they are capable."

In spite of difficulties the Conference was making fairly good progress. On November 27, 1930 Sastri wrote to his brother:

"For a wonder, the British people have almost reconciled themselves to Dominion Status. They may make sundry detailed objections, but on the principle they are going to yield. Our Hindu-Moslem differences are still threatening to break up everything. Sikhs are intractable. The Princes seem reasonable. The future may disclose deep cleavages but so far all looks well."

Sastri recognised that "Sapru was easily the most influential and able of us all," and that, "there was never a question of his patriotism or unselfishness." So he was happy to stand by Sapru and help him. No doubt he differed with Sapru now and then and always spoke out his differences to him. But it was not Sastri's way to miss the wood of a common purpose for the trees of difference. He

stated his position very clearly in his letter to Pandit Kunzru on July 3, 1931 :

“Here let me state what seems to be a fundamental difference of standpoint. Some persons would cap their criticism by complete dissociation and refuse to share responsibility for a scheme in which they saw glaring defects. I am no less keen in finding fault, but in cases of cardinal importance I cannot bring myself to stand out and say I disown it all. The need of a settlement today is paramount, the Round Table Conference is at work for the purpose. I take a full share in the discussion and in the shaping of the plan. Unless the result is something fantastically absurd or unworkable, I think it my duty to stand by it. And it will need some strong and unflinching support, if it is to save the situation.

“Don’t mistake me, please. I admit nearly all your criticism. It is not too late to rectify some of the defects. Let us try our best to improve the scheme. When we have done our best, a keen eye will detect serious flaws. That, however, should not cause us to abandon the child and run away.”

As the Conference dragged on with the interminable work of various committees the freezing English winter set in. The atmosphere of the Conference itself became less cheering. The shadow of the communal problem began to darken. But the general picture was still one of hope towards the end of the first R.T.C., and Prof. Harold Laski who was helping Lord Sankey in the work of the Conference could write in his letter to Justice Holmes on January 10, 1931 : “The Indian show at the moment goes very well.” Lord Sankey with his suavity and sympathetic imagination was the best of all possible Chairmen for the Federal Structure Committee. The intellectual subtlety of Sapru and the heal-

ing influence of Sastri's magnanimity helped a great deal to put shape and substance into the federal concept.

The concluding days of the conference were naturally spent in dinners and speeches. By all accounts, the climax of these functions was the dinner given on behalf of the British Indian Delegates. It was as distinguished a gathering as one could ever imagine. For, representatives of every aspect of British life—literature, art, journalism, scholarship, politics, the stage and the church—were there. Diplomats of every clime and country were also there. Sastri, the acknowledged master of Ciceronian oratory, who proposed the toast to the guests, was acclaimed by all present to have excelled his own incomparable form and splendour of eloquence. His name and fame stood higher than ever for wisdom, eloquence and conciliation. Edward Thompson writing to Sastri a letter on November 17, 1930 says: "I have a great admiration for men like you and Sapru. You need more courage and wisdom than any men for a great while. Washington had an easy job, compared with yours." Writing about the R.T.C., Prof. Laski says in a letter of December 27, 1930 to Justice Holmes: "One or two of the Indians are really first-rate people, especially Sastri whom I should reckon among the noblest men I have ever met."

CHAPTER XIV

THE GANDHI IRWIN AGREEMENT

On the same day and almost the same hour as Sastri, Sapru and other Round Tablers arrived in Bombay from London (6th February 1931) Pandit Motilal Nehru died in Allahabad. This was a great blow to Sastri, Sapru and Jayakar, because they had counted on Motilal's moderating influence for bringing about a settlement between the Viceroy and Mahatma Gandhi. The peace-makers, however, proceeded with their mission, for they fully realized that a Round Table Conference without Gandhi was like Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. The difficulties in the way of a settlement were formidable, but the peace-loving and spiritual qualities of the two personalities involved—Gandhi and Irwin—held out hopes which were ultimately fulfilled. The part that Sapru and Jayakar played in bringing about the Gandhi-Irwin Agreement is well-known. Sastri's own part was intimate and important though he carefully kept it away from the public gaze.

From Bombay Sastri went to New Delhi where he had a long talk with the Viceroy about the Round Table Conference and its results. He urged that a personal meeting with Gandhi was the only way to get Congress' co-operation and to bring the Mahatma to the Round Table Conference. The Viceroy expressed his difficulties, but when Sastri convinced him that all his difficulties would vanish the moment he met Gandhi, Lord Irwin agreed to meet him if the latter desired it. From Delhi Sastri went to Allahabad and met Gandhi and the members of the Congress Working Committee. They heard him well. Gandhi wrote to Irwin asking for an interview, saying that he wished to see Irwin the man, not Irwin the Viceroy. Sastri commented in a letter

of the period : "There is some opening. For, I believe the man is better than the Viceroy."

Sastri returned to Delhi, met the Viceroy and urged him to telegraph to Gandhi as soon as his letter was received. On February 16, 1931, Sastri wrote to his brother: "Just returned from the Viceroy's house. Sapru, Jayakar and I had an interview to discuss matters concerning Gandhi's visit tomorrow and peace matters generally. The first interview between them will be strictly private. If they hit it off, then other talks will follow on details. At these talks we shall join—also several others. Not without hope." Gandhi arrived in Delhi on the 17th February. Sastri was stirred to his depths and wrote to Venkatarama Sastri: "This afternoon 'the two uncrucified Christs meet.'" As the talks progressed well, Sastri wrote on February 23 to a friend, "I prepared each for the other and feel rewarded. They say his (Gandhi's) influence over the Congress Working Committee is supreme and will prevail over Jawaharlal and others." Of Irwin, Sastri wrote in the same letter, "For a wonder, Irwin is willing patiently to discuss every single point, allow for the natural weaknesses of Congressmen and meet the demand as far as possible. In some cases his response far exceeds my expectation. So there is hope."

For some ten days the negotiations went on smoothly and then difficulties arose. Sastri made a fervent appeal to Gandhi on behalf of peace and he was profoundly touched. Let the rest of the story be told in Sastri's own words*:

"About the 27th, matters had taken a serious hue.

I went over to Gandhi on the 28th, took him aside to Ansari's private room and almost lectured to him for

*From an unpublished transcript of a private talk to a few select friends delivered by Sastri on March 30, 1931 at his house in Mylapore, Madras.

more than an hour. The gist of what I said was as follows :—

‘Only half a dozen of your followers really believe in non-violence at present owing to policy. What would happen if something should happen to you ? Only a frail body stood between India and chaos. You are aged ; you take frugal food ; people say you have blood pressure. You have succeeded in bringing the movement up to the present pitch with non-violence being observed in practice to a very large extent. Do not tempt Providence. Work upon the present basis. Fight for all that you are worth at the Conference. Get the utmost that you can. If you do not do it, and the movement goes on, it will be a tremendous responsibility which will lie upon you. It will be too heavy. You told me on a previous occasion ‘I do not care what happens. I must satisfy my conscience’. But good and true men would judge your action differently if, knowing as you did that your people took to non-violence not as an unalterable creed but for the sake of policy, you did not act properly and give up the movement at this stage.’

“Gandhi said he had thought of these things. He would think over them again. He was now definitely for cessation and for peace. And he would try to bring it by all means in his power. I told him also that most of his followers were anxious for peace. He said finally: ‘Please come and address my Working Committee tomorrow’. It appeared to me that Gandhi seemed to be much impressed with what I said.

“The next day, 28th February, I addressed the Congress Working Committee for over an hour. I rubbed them the right way, spoke to them of their sacrifices and sufferings; I told them that what was achiev-

ed—something had been achieved—at the conference was due to them. And I placed them at their feet in order that they might grasp them and finish the work that had been left undone because there were plenty of things about which no decision had been taken. It was for them to take up the threads again and bring to India the peace which it urgently required. There was pin-drop silence while I spoke. Malaviya, Mrs. Naidu, Ansari and two other Mahomedans, probably also C.R., seemed to be in favour of peace. I told them plainly that police enquiry was impossible; when a very big issue was at stake this seemed to be insignificant. The Committee seemed to be impressed with what I said. After my address I told them I would not remain there any longer because they must settle the question between themselves. I went away and sat on the verandah. Perhaps I looked tired. Mrs. Naidu seeing me come out came also; took out of her vanity box her bottle of *Eau de Cologne*, sprinkled it on her hand-kerchief and held it to my nose. A man belonging to *The Hindustan Times*, who was looking on, invented the story that I had become unconscious and I was revived by *Eau de Cologne*!

“All went on very well till March 4. There was a party at the Viceregal Lodge. The Viceroy asked me to step aside and told me that everything had gone astray, and that what I had warned him against, that is, Gandhi's trouble over some moral scruple in regard to a minor issue, had happened. I was surprised and asked him what the matter was. He said Gandhi at the moment he was about to sign the agreement sprang a surprise and said he would not do it because he would not subscribe to the statement made about the return of confiscated property, because all that had been done

by collusion between Tahsildars and the buyers. He asked me to see Gandhi which I did with Sapru and Jayakar. He was then with his Working Committee, who all seemed to be pleased with Gandhi's decision not to sign the agreement because of the sentence in regard to confiscated property. Gandhi described the scene at the Viceregal Lodge in graphic terms. He was about to sign it, dipped his pen in ink, but the pen would not move. He was intellectually convinced that he had agreed to the agreement. But there was some moral scruple, something in his conscience which said, 'Don't sign'. He went over the terms of the agreement once, twice and at last stumbled upon the portion relating to confiscated property. Yes, the thing dawned upon him; how could he possibly sign that statement when he knew that the transfer of property was in most cases fraudulent. The Viceroy told him that it was rather unfortunate that there should be this trouble at this stage when he had cabled to the Cabinet and the whole world was watching India and was ready to welcome the news of the agreement. Gandhi told him 'I don't care for the world: I can't sign a statement which I know is untrue'; and then he came away. He told me it was a tragedy which dogged his life, of stumbling over a small difficulty when large issues were being solved. That was the case in South Africa and that was the case now. What was he to do? We put in that the matter did not seem to be very serious and that some device could easily be found to get over the difficulty. We argued and argued till it was suggested by me, perhaps by C.R. also, that in the statement it could be added that Gandhi thought that, according to his information and belief, some at least of these sales have been unlawful and unjust. Gandhi gasped at the sug-

gestion and said, 'It would do'. We then went to the Viceroy's house at nine o'clock. The Viceroy would not consent to this addition. Emerson who was there backed up the Viceroy. We fought and wrangled but the Viceroy was stiff. After an hour or so the Viceroy asked Emerson to phone to Rainy. Rainy asked what the matter was. The Viceroy asked Emerson to phone him and get his opinion. Emerson came back with the reply that Rainy thought that the addition could not be made because Local Governments would feel insulted and humiliated. The Viceroy looked at us and said: 'What can I do?' Then the Viceroy asked Emerson to phone to Rainy asking him to come. Rainy said he was in his pyjamas. The Viceroy said: 'It does not matter; let him put on an overcoat and come at once'. And Rainy came not in his pyjamas and with his overcoat, but fully dressed! We discussed the whole matter again for an hour. And then Rainy, clever man that he was, suggested that the Government could add to Gandhi's statement that on the information before them they cannot accept Gandhi's contention. Emerson was apparently satisfied, but the Viceroy was not. He said it could not be done. He paced to and fro; put coal into the fire; stirred it; paced to and fro again and appeared to be in mental agony; at last he said the thing was impossible. And then Sapru and Jayakar signed to me that there was no further use in staying. I told the Viceroy: 'Look here, you seem to be just under the spell of the moral scruple under which Gandhi laboured not many hours ago'. The Viceroy asked me what I meant. We all told him that the matter seemed to be so simple and small that a big agreement should not be risked upon such an insignificant issue. Finally he asked Sir George Rainy whe-

ther it was all right. Rainy said, 'Yes'. And then the Viceroy agreed. The Viceroy asked us to secure Gandhi's consent to this addition by the Government and I assured him on behalf of Gandhi that there would not be trouble from the other side. We went to Gandhi. He was just in the attitude of sleep with a pillow not even a finger in height. Gandhi at once agreed to the suggestion and there the matter ended at half past one."

On March 4, 1931, Lord Irwin wrote to Sastri :—

PRIVATE

My dear Sastri,

I must write one line of thanks to you for the part you have played in making this agreement with Mr. Gandhi possible. I can guess how great your part has been, and believe me, I am VERY grateful.

Yours very sincerely,

IRWIN

CHAPTER XV

THE SECOND ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

Srinivasa Sastri sailed for England on April 18, 1931 to give evidence before the Select Committee of the British Parliament on East African Affairs. Thus, he was in England some months before the Second Round Table Conference started. He took the opportunity to create a favourable climate for the Second R.T.C. by dwelling on the significance of Mahatma Gandhi's participation in the Conference. He also interpreted to the British public 'the enigma' of Gandhi and revealed the lovable human figure and the essentially loyal temperament that was behind the relentless opponent of British imperialism. In a broadcast over the B.B.C. Sastri roundly blamed the unstable and disappointing British policy for the alienation of Gandhi. He said:—

"Sad was the day when his faith (in Britain) was quenched; sad were the events which did the deed. Still, he can sympathise with those of his countrymen whose faith in Britain, more robust than his own, has survived that day and those events. Between him and the leaders of the Moderate School the bond of sympathy has always been more real than between his followers and them. His vision is larger than theirs; it can appreciate more and subtler affinities, and the next session of the Round Table Conference need have no misgiving because he comes unattended. His critics in this country will have the surprise of their lives when they discover how easily the tenderness and chivalry of his nature can be touched, and how privations of

the flesh and wounds of the soul have left his reason without a cloud."

In the meanwhile, disturbing news came from India that Gandhi had refused to attend the R.T.C. Lord Irwin retired in April 1931 and Lord Willingdon succeeded him as Viceroy. Differences arose between the Government and Mahatma Gandhi as regards the interpretation of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. In consequence, Gandhi declared that he would not go to the R.T.C. Sastri sent a moving cable imploring Gandhi to go to the Conference. Gandhi wrote back to him:—

"I had your touching cable. I have sent you a reply to soothe you. I am not shirking the R.T.C. But it is not possible through a letter to give you an idea of the difficulties that face me. Provincial Governments are trampling the Settlement under foot. Repression is raising its spiked head. If you have the patience to follow the pages of '*Young India*', you can learn something of what I mean. I have published as yet not one-tenth of what is happening. The question then may be: Can I leave India when trouble is brewing here? But I am in touch with Simla."

Much to the relief of Sastri and indeed everyone connected with the Conference, further negotiation with the Government opened the way for Gandhi's attending the Conference, and he sailed for London on August 29, 1931. He was in time for the Second R.T.C. which began on September 7, 1931.

Only two weeks before the beginning of the Second Round Table Conference MacDonald tendered his resignation and that of the Labour Ministry to the King. A series of controversies concerning the economic crisis and measures to meet it compelled MacDonald to take this step. He was immediately asked to form a National Government. For-

tunately for the R.T.C., Lord Sankey continued in office. Wedgwood Benn was replaced by Sir Samuel Hoare of the Conservative Party as Secretary of State for India. He was hampered in his work by some Tory opposition, especially that of Churchill. The Indian Round Tablers naturally viewed him with less sympathy and watched his steps with circumspection. Soon after his arrival in London Gandhi met, in the company of Sastri, MacDonald. It was a pity, however, that MacDonald and Gandhi did not hit it off. Sastri used to say that this was no surprise, considering the fact that MacDonald was elusive and lacked the hard core of principles which made a man steady in character and steadfast in purpose, while Gandhi was earnest and sincere to the core and disliked mental reservations. Gandhi saw Sir Samuel Hoare also in the company of Sastri. Though Sir Samuel appeared hard and unyielding, he was frank and straight. Gandhi recognised in Sir Samuel an honest Englishman and his relations with him were friendly and marked by mutual respect.

Almost from the first day of the Conference the communal question dominated the discussions. Gandhi's coming to the Conference did not bring much cheer either to himself or to the Conference. The demands made by the Depressed Classes for separate electorates like the Muslims, hurt Gandhi like some physical injury. Sastri realised that Gandhi was so unhappy that he might break away from the Conference at any moment. So he spent all his powers of persuasion both in private and at the Conference to dissuade Gandhi from abandoning the Conference. In his letter to Venkatarama Sastri on October 2, 1931 Sastri wrote: "The omens are black. Gandhi is a harassed man but also a victim of his own greatness. He cannot get away from shibboleths and accept compromises. He says he will go away after stating his case, which means after

delivering his ultimatum." To Sastri, with his overwhelming desire for negotiation and compromise at that supreme hour of crisis and opportunity, Gandhi's long speeches repeating again and again the same contentions seemed singularly unfortunate. The Mahatma reiterated three claims and these were fiercely contested by some other delegates. His first and foremost claim was that Congress alone represented India, a claim understood, and to a certain extent sympathised with by Sastri and the likes of him, but hotly resented by the Muslims and the Depressed Classes. Secondly, he asserted that the grant of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes would vivisect Hinduism and create a permanent cleavage amongst the Hindus. Thirdly, he insisted that separate electorates for the Muhammadan community should be abandoned so that Hindus and Muslims could learn to live together in a united India, which, he claimed, they would do but for the Britisher's interference. Gandhi's claims led to a curious cohesion of all the minorities who hardened in their bargain and became extremely unreasonable in their demands.

Perhaps the most dramatic moment of the Conference was during the meeting of the Minorities Committee when the Prime Minister made his offer of arbitration:—

"Mr. MacDonald : Will you, each of you, every member of this Committee, sign a request to me to settle the community question and pledge yourselves to accept my decision ? That, I think is a fair offer.

Mr. Sastri (Hindus) : We are willing on this side.

Mr. MacDonald : But I do not want any section or any one man. Will the members of this Committee sign that declaration, with the assurance that the decision come to will be accepted by you ?"

Unfortunately nothing came of this offer and the occasion served only to throw glaring light on our communal

dissensions and thereby to harden British opinion against Dominion Status for India.

In the opinion of Srinivasa Sastri, a distressing feature of the Second Round Table Conference was that several delegates, including Mahatma Gandhi, came with "mandates" from the organizations and interests which they represented. He deplored the crippling effects of these mandates on the Conference. The issues before the Conference went to the roots of national life and touched the fundamentals of the British connection. "If ever the art of compromise was needed in human affairs, it was when British and Indian—Hindu, Mussalman, Sikh, Christian and untouchable—met one another in St. James's Palace in the closing months of 1931." It was Sastri's great grief that this art of compromise was not much in evidence in the sayings and doings of some of our foremost leaders. Of Gandhi's own part he wrote*:

"If he had only been a little more of a realist on the claims of the Minorities and on the reservations, what could he not have accomplished? To speculate is to be unhappy. He might have been the leader of a united Nationalist Party. But he preferred to be a mere Congress mandatory. To enunciate principles, to fight for ideals, to make propaganda—these are high duties and require rare ability. But when agitation had come to a head, it is no ignoble part to make the most of the occasion and get the people some return for their sufferings."

Sastri took an active part in the Conference and its Committees and amazed everyone by the subtlety of his thought and expression. There was one particular moment at a sitting of the Federal Structure Committee when he

*Mandates at the R.T.C.—"Indian Review", January, 1932.

astonished Lord Sankey, the Chairman, by his subtle mastery of the English language:—

**Mr. Sastri* : On No. 9, where we say “by the pooling of ideas and by the willingness to forego individual desires for the common good”—I do not think it is satisfactory to ask people to give up their individual desires for the common good. I cannot give up my ideas for the common good, in any case. I might give up my plan, but I could not give up my ideas.

Sir Samuel Hoare : Yes, I think it is meant to go the other way. It is “to forego their individual views for the sake of”. I think we could make that clear, could we not? Could you do it by transposition of the words—“and by their willingness to forego, for the common good, individual desires”? I think that would meet you.

Mr. Sastri : Yes.

Chairman : Mr. Sastri is quite right. If I may say so, he often teaches me what good English ought to be.

On December 1, 1931 at 2 a.m. Sastri made what was perhaps his most memorable speech at the R.T.C. It is a speech, addressed in the first part to the Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald and in the latter part to Mahatma Gandhi, and brings into dramatic relief Sastri's middle position as friend and reconciler of both parties.

He appealed to the Prime Minister not to listen to smaller counsels and go back on the ideal of Federation to which “we have all yielded our hearts”. Then he summed up the root cause of the Indian revolt and said, “Prime Minister, what is wanting in our loyalty to the Commonwealth is not admiration of its greatness or material glory.

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but it is the lack of occasion for us to take pride in the Empire and to call it our own." He told him in ringing tones, "The time has now come for you to take one long step from which there shall be no returning." On the subject of safeguards, he recognised that for sometime to come some safeguards were necessary, but he insisted, "We must be on our guard to admit into the Constitution no other safeguard or reservation, by whatever title it be called, which could not be demonstrated to be anything but in India's interest." He went on to suggest that "There are ways in which, these safeguards could be obtained in substance without our Constitution being disfigured by Constitutional provisions". If, however, they must put them in the Constitution, Sastri made two suggestions:

"One suggestion is that you will put these restrictions into that chapter of the Constitution which will be open to revision and modification by the Indian Legislature without the necessity of coming to the Imperial Parliament for dealing with them. We do not like the idea of coming to this country and asking for constitutional advance any more.

"The other suggestion which I would make is that you should enter a clause in the Instrument of Instructions which each Viceroy receives on appointment, to the effect that the safeguarding powers vested in him singly as apart from his Cabinet in India, that those safeguarding powers must be exercised solely in the interests of India."

Then he uttered a word of exhortation to the Prime Minister not to entrust the future work of the Conference to the unenthusiastic, dry-as-dust bureaucracy. For, "In the long corridors and haunts of the India Office and of the great secretariat that we have built in New Delhi there are many dark places where these beautiful and moving

ideals are apt to be strangled, or at least they will be delayed until they have no further significance to those who have been deeply interested in them." Finally he said:

"And, Prime Minister, when you constitute these commissions and important committees and entrust vital aspects to their charge, do as you did this year, summon Mahatma Gandhi and his associates to it; let him not in despair go back to the arid fields of non-co-operation."

Then he apostrophized the Mahatma and made a magnificent and memorable appeal in his most fervent manner:

"Yes, Mahatma, if I may apostrophize you, forgetting for a moment the Prime Minister, your duty hereafter is with us. You have acquired an unparalleled reputation. Your influence is unequalled. Your spiritual power to command men and to raise them above themselves is acknowledged all over the world. Shall not these great gifts be harnessed to the constructive work of the nation? Have you the heart, I ask you, still to lead your people, trustful and obedient, through 'the valley of humiliation'* if it be not necessary—and I contend it is no longer necessary? The steps that we have taken so far round this table mark a distinct stage in advance. It may not be as satisfactory as you wish. It is certainly not as satisfactory as I wish. Nevertheless, it seems to me that you and I and other friends here, working together, can frame this Constitution and so shape it that while deriving the most that it can yield we can also look forward with confidence to a future when we shall be enabled to perfect it, and that at no distant date.....

*Extreme suffering. (In Bunyan's 'Pilgrim's Progress', Christian passes through 'the valley of humiliation')

“The British people often do wrong, the British people often take unwise courses. Nevertheless, in the long run they come back to the ways of reason, moderation and justice. This is one of the occasions when it seems to me that they are in their most winning and admirable mood. Take them now and victory is ours.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE SECOND CAPE TOWN CONFERENCE

Soon after the end of the Second Round Table Conference Srinivasa Sastri sailed from London for Cape Town to join the Indian delegation to the Second Cape Town Conference between the Governments of India and South Africa. In June, 1931, Sastri wrote with some liveliness to Gundappa : "As soon as the R.T.C. is over in December I am to voyage with Kodanda Rao once more to South Africa. The Cape Town Agreement has to be renewed and an Indian delegation must include me. I have become indispensable for at least one job. Is it not a feather in my cap?" But as the months passed and hopes of a communal settlement faded away, Sastri was far from enthusiastic about his visit to South Africa. On October 2, 1931 he wrote to T. R. Venkatarama Sastri, "With the last hope of this R.T.C. shattered, I have no heart for the Cape Town R.T.C. The only question is, shall I refuse to go? The next few days will decide it." Ultimately he did go ; the call of duty became irresistible.

The mission of the Indian delegation to South Africa had two important objects. One was concerned with the renewal of the Agreement of 1927. The other related to the threat that faced the Indian trader in Transvaal. To take the latter question first, public opinion as well as the laws were very adverse to the Indians and all coloured people in that Province. The laws prevented coloured persons from acquiring property in what is known as the Rand or "gold-bearing area" or from holding public "stands" for purposes of trade in this area. Notwithstanding these prohibitory enactments, some Indians owned considerable property and

many Indians occupied "stands" in the Rand and carried on a fairly lucrative trade. Their success roused jealousy, especially of the Jews, the chief rivals of our traders. So from time to time a hue and cry was raised that the Indian was penetrating into the White quarters by fraudulent means and that his prosperity was a threat to White economy and that he himself was a menace which should be eliminated as quickly as possible. The rumblings of the trouble were heard even when Sastri was leaving South Africa in 1929 and Sir K. V. Reddy succeeded him as Agent General. In subsequent years, the attitude of the white rulers of South Africa stiffened to the point of asking that the Indians should forfeit their properties and get out of the trading "stands". The Government of South Africa returned to their favourite policy of segregation and introduced the Transvaal Asiatic Land Tenure Amendment Bill by which Indians would be obliged to quit their property in the forbidden areas and move to one of the "locations" or special areas set apart for Indian occupation. This Bill was naturally opposed by Indians, since it went clean against the letter as well as the spirit of the Cape Town Agreement. After a good deal of persuasion by the Government of India, the Government of South Africa agreed to postpone the Bill until such time as a delegation from India went over to South Africa and sat round a table in conference. The Cape Town Agreement had to be renewed at the end of five years and a Round Table Conference was to be summoned. It was proposed that this Conference might be used to discuss the Transvaal question also

The Indian delegation to the Second Cape Town Conference consisted of Sir Fazl-i-Hussain, then Member of the Government of India in charge of Indians Overseas, Sir Geoffrey Corbett, Sir D'arcy Lindsay, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, Sir K. V. Reddy, then Agent General of the Government of India in South Africa, and Sastri, with Sir G. S. Bajpai as

Secretary. The task of the delegation was by no means easy. Some of our Indians in South Africa, among whom there were still a few who had taken part in the original passive resistance struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi, wanted the delegation to get all the laws imposing disability on Indians repealed. They told the delegation that if they could not do this they could go back. The Union Government of South Africa was on the other hand keen on driving the Indian settler into special 'locations'. Mr. Peru, the then Minister of Justice, was a determined enemy of the non-Whites and he exercised a malevolent influence on the whole question. Happily, General Hertzog was the Prime Minister and Dr. Malan the Minister for the Interior, and Sastri's influence with both these leaders was very great. They had their difficulties and Sastri recognised them. At the same time, he felt deeply for the difficulties of the Indian brethren in South Africa. The Indian delegation set before itself the task of validating in some suitable manner the existing Indian ownership of property and also of securing ownership to the future generations of Indians, especially in the matter of trading stands. For, petty trade was the one avenue of livelihood for our people in Transvaal. Dr. Malan and others who were willing to help the Indian cause explained to the members of the Indian delegation that any legislation which was meant to give relief to the Indian community had no chance whatever of going through the Parliament. The redress, therefore, had to be worked out through administrative procedure. One procedure was luckily available in the existing restrictive legislation. There was a clause that "No coloured person shall occupy any stand or carry on trade except in locations—places as may be set apart for the purpose by the Mining Commissioner." The Indian delegation was informed that the Government would make rules under which the Mining Commissioner would act in favour of Indians by declaring

areas already occupied by them as fit for Indian occupation and that further he would be empowered to pass orders favouring Indians in future also. Our compatriots in South Africa were naturally opposed to this idea of being at the mercy of the Mining Commissioner. But, as it was the best solution available in the circumstances and as there was every reason to believe in the good intentions of Dr. Malan and his colleagues, the Indian delegation reluctantly agreed to the proposals. This they did only after having satisfied themselves on expert legal advice that the Mining Commissioner's action could be effective in favour of the Indian settler.

There were difficulties even with regard to the renewal of the Cape Town Agreement. The Indian side valued most the famous "Uplift Clause" of the Agreement in which the South African Government undertook to treat the Indian community as a part of the permanent population and to help them in educational and other matters so as to raise them to higher levels of equality with the Europeans. From the point of view of the South African Whites, the important part of the Agreement was the "Repatriation Clause" by which the 'assisted emigration' of Indians back to the motherland was to be promoted. For three years the scheme worked very well, but in the last two years of the period of the Agreement the number of Indians repatriated was negligible. For, after the first flush of repatriation, the number of Indian settlers who were born in India or who had vital connections with the motherland had become exceedingly small. Moreover, those who returned to the motherland did not send encouraging reports of conditions in India. The South African Government was not keen on renewing the Agreement unless the scheme of assisted emigration could be operated effectively. Indians were totally against this clause of assisted emigration. The Indian delegation rather ingeniously suggested a way out of the dif-

ficulty. The clause under the old Agreement of 1927 was that the Indian settler was to be assisted to emigrate to India and to "other countries". Sastri and the other delegates therefore suggested that assisted emigration to countries like Brazil, British Guiana, Tanganyika and other countries might be tried. To make the proposal acceptable to the Indian community the word 'colonization' was used and their role as pioneers was emphasised.

After much negotiation and with statesman-like help from General Hertzog, the Cape Town Agreement was renewed with the "Uplift Clause" retained, segregation in terms of race abandoned and the ownership and trade of the Indians in Transvaal saved from immediate peril. The Second Cape Town Agreement was by no means as successful as the first, but some gains were won for the Indian settler in spite of the widely prevalent and much aggravated anti-Indian feeling amongst the ruling Whites. Sastri's wise and forbearant diplomacy, and his influence with Hertzog and Malan were of the utmost value in the delicate negotiations.

Sastri watched to the very end of his life with intimate concern the shifting fortunes of the Indian settlers in South Africa and the frequent outbursts of racial feeling against them. When in 1943 the South African Government headed by Field Marshal Smuts brought a Bill which extended the peculiar difficulties in ownership experienced by the Indians in Transvaal to Durban and possibly elsewhere in Natal, Sastri in conjunction with two other former Agents General of India in South Africa, Sir Maharaj Singh and Sir Raza Ali, made an appeal to Smuts in the following terms:

"Amidst the world conflagration India expects you as the seniormost British statesman to drop the pending Bill. Natal's Indian problem is fundamentally different from the Transvaal's. The interim Act of 1939 does not

justify extension to Natal. While appreciating your parliamentary difficulties we are bound to say that the Bill, if passed, would shatter the faith of those Indians who still advocate India remaining within the British Commonwealth. As South Africa's friends, we earnestly suggest a conference after the war without prejudicing the issue by passing the present Bill, since no Union Government would be able to resist the demand for putting it on a permanent basis."

It was, however, Sastri's misfortune to witness a steady decline in the status of the Indians in South Africa. He had always felt that the colour bar, whatever its shape or form, was an infringement of fundamental human rights. As far back as 1924, he had urged that the question of racial discrimination in South Africa should be referred to the League of Nations. When the Government of India referred the question of Indian disabilities to the United Nations in 1946, Smuts himself defended South Africa before that world body. Sastri, then in the last days of his life, issued a spirited statement:

"I cannot but think that this fact should be made known to the United Nations in its hellish character and their intervention invoked in all solemnity. The Field Marshal and his sonorous hypocrisy should be exposed to the gaze of all honest men, and that section of the British people, who have made themselves responsible for this outrage on all that is redeeming in human character, must be disowned lock, stock and barrel, not only by the inhabitants of the British Isles but by all that is progressive and upward-looking in the world."

CHAPTER XVII

THE THIRD R.T.C., AND THE WHITE PAPER

Srinivasa Sastri returned to India from South Africa towards the end of February 1932. Mahatma Gandhi was in Yeravada Jail, and it was a deep disappointment to Sastri that he could not make a personal report to Gandhi on the Second Cape Town Conference. When the Municipal Corporation of Madras presented an address to Sastri and Sir K. V. Reddy in April 1932, Sastri made the following fervent reference to Mahatma Gandhi :—

“Twice before it has fallen to my lot to return from South Africa after fulfilling certain missions. On both these occasions, it was felt by all my colleagues that the first thing to do on return to the shores of India was to go to Mahatma Gandhi and make a report to him of our doings. To no one could a prior report be made. If he approved of our work, that was enough—this was the feeling not merely of myself, who may be considered to have a weakness for Mahatma Gandhi, but of all with whom I was associated. And if I may for the first time publish a secret, it was also the feeling of the members of the Government of India. How sad I must feel now, you can imagine, when it is not possible for me to make a similar report to the one man in all India who has a right to form a judgment of South African affairs and lead public sentiment in the country.”

Sastri did not approve of the resumption of Civil Disobedience. He had most earnestly urged on Gandhi to explore every possible avenue of peace and not to go back to the “arid fields of non-co-operation”. But he was deep-

ly grieved at "the policy of harshness and cruelty adopted by the Government." He wrote two letters to Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister, protesting against the barbaric treatment by the police of the civil resisters and warning him against yielding to the smaller counsels in favour of immediate Provincial Autonomy and postponement of Federation, a step, which would be fatal to the welfare of India. Sastri urged : "Speed up, speed up. The slowest machinery in the world is the Government of India reforming itself. Ordinances and *lathis* can only have a short day. During that short day the new order must be brought into being."

Early in 1932, the British Government sent out to India three committees of special enquiry—the first, into the franchise, the second, into the financial relations between the Federal Structure and the Federal Units, and the third, into the question of the financial position of the princely states in a Federation. On the 27th June, 1932 Sir Samuel Hoare made a statement in the House of Commons announcing a complete change of plan by which the Round Table method was to be replaced by the setting up of Consultative Committees, and with a hint of the remote possibility of "the summoning of a body for further discussion in London, the size and personnel of which would be determined with reference to the number and character of subjects requiring further discussion." The new plan evoked strong protest in India. Sapru and Jayakar who were members of the Consultative Committee tendered their resignations to the Viceroy. Sastri felt that a mortal blow had been struck to Indian aspirations. He wrote to Kodanda Rao, "It is all over now. No approach to Dominion Status—*Rule Britannia*." Averse as Sastri essentially was to Non-co-operation, he felt the progressives ought to stand together and follow Sapru and Jayakar. In fact, he backed

up the Liberal non-co-operation with his seniority and matchless prestige by being the first signatory to the statement which deplored the new procedure as unacceptable and roundly declared :—

“In the circumstances we are clearly of the opinion that the best interests of the country require that those of our countrymen who may be invited to assist in the further stages of constitution-making should withhold co-operation unless and until the former method is restored.”

‘Liberal non-co-operation’ succeeded to the extent that the British Government restored the Round Table Conference method, but it was a shrunken R.T.C. that they summoned, shorn of some of the principal personalities of the previous Conferences.

On August 17, 1932, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, the British Prime Minister, announced the Communal Award whereby the Moslems were given certain weightages in the Central and Provincial Legislatures and the Depressed Classes were to elect a certain number of members in the Legislatures in a separate electorate of their own, while they were also at liberty to put forward their candidates in the general electorate. Gandhi had said at the Round Table Conference that he would resist with his life the grant of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes. He meant it literally. In a letter of 11th March, 1932 from Yeravada prison to Sir Samuel Hoare, he reiterated his resolve of fasting unto death in the event of creation of separate electorates for the Harijans. The Mahatma, true to his word, commenced his fast on 20th September. Followers and critics alike trembled for the life of Gandhiji and met together to find a way out to save it. Events moved fast. Persons and parties acted

with celerity. The Government did what it could to assist a negotiated settlement. Ultimately, a system of primary elections for the Harijans to be followed by general elections for both sections of the Hindus was evolved and the famous Poona Pact came into being. I quote below a letter written by Gandhi to Srinivasa Sastri from Yeravada prison a few hours before the commencement of the historic fast. It reveals the agony of the soul which led the Mahatma to enter upon an ordeal of stupendous and tragic implications. It also reveals the deep love and regard Gandhi had for Sastri and his yearning to be in unison with his beloved friend and brother :

“This is early morning of Tuesday just a little after 3 o’clock. I have just finished a brief letter to Gurudev.

“You have been ever present before me during these days of anguish. I have perhaps read your thoughts. You know my regard for you. Though we are as poles asunder, or seem to be, in mental outlook at so many points, our hearts are one. Wherever therefore I have been able to agree with you, it has been a matter of pure joy. Perhaps this step of mine has been for you the last straw. Even so I want to have your laceration. For, I do not want you to cease to strive with me—I remained in banishment from my eldest brother for, I think, fourteen years. Year after year he sent me curses by registered post. I rejoiced in his curses. His curses were so many sparks of love—I won him. Six months before his death he saw that I was in the right. One of the reasons for his wrath was this very question of untouchability. In our case,

I do not know who is in error.* But I do know that you are as blood brother to me. At this (may be) last crisis, you must not cease to strive with me. Send me your curses or your blessings.

"I wrote to you a month ago inquiring about your health. I never got a reply. I wonder if you ever got my post card."

Sastri was presented with a civic address by the Coimbatore Municipality on his birthday, the 22nd September which was the third day of Gandhi's fast. In his reply, he made the following reference to Mahatma Gandhi :

"In these days of anxiety no proceedings, whether public or private, may be begun, without the hearts of all who are engaged therein turning towards what is happening within the walls of the Central Prison at Yeravada. The public mind and the hearts of private friends of the Mahatma are alike agitated as they were agitated on few occasions, to contemplate the great stake upon which he has placed his life. His life, it would be needless to say, is lived as few lives in history or fable have been lived. It is of supreme consequence to our kind ; and he has now risked it in a cause dear to all of us. We follow with trepidation, and after the morning news in the papers, with some hope, what is going on amongst the leaders of India assembled near Poona. It is a great relief and satis-

* Sastri's opinion on the communal decision, as given in the *Servant of India*, August 25, 1932 is as follows : "An adverse criticism of the communal award is easy and would from several aspects be deserved, but it ill becomes those who by their failure cast the odious duty on Government to take up a censorious attitude. Seeing that the door is not closed yet on agreement of the communities, and that in any event the award is subject to alteration, at the end of a period, those who value peace must accept the award with as much grace as possible. The big constitutional issues to follow will tax all our wisdom. Let us await that supreme test."

faction to know that the messages received are full of hope."

When the Poona Pact was concluded and Gandhi broke his fast, Sastri sent the following telegram on the 25th September to the Mahatma in his inimitable style :

"Million homes rejoice and bless your superb service performed in your superb style. I confess I trembled in doubt, but the result vindicates and establishes you indisputably the foremost 'Untouchable' and 'Unapproachable'."

Mahadev Desai recorded in his diary of 25-9-1932 :

"Bapu (Gandhiji) was very happy to receive at last the telegram from Shri Srinivasa Sastri. He wired in reply to say that the telegram for which he was pining had been received."

Sastri was preserving his strength in order to attend the Third Round Table Conference and to do one "last piece of service to the Motherland." When the Liberal Federation offered the Presidentship of the year, he declined and publicly said that he was conserving his energies for the Round Table Conference. In September, he was invited to be the Rhodes Memorial Lecturer in Oxford for 1933. Sir Robert Boden, General Smuts and Prof. Einstein were among the six previous lecturers. Sastri declined this exceedingly high honour, partly for reasons of health and partly out of modesty born of what Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyer called "Sastri's self-mistrust." The offer was renewed twice in subsequent years, but Sastri again declined. In declining the first invitation of 1932, signed by the Right Honourable H. A. L. Fisher, Sastri was also influenced by his devout desire to let nothing stand in the way of conserving his strength for his work in connection with the making of a Constitution for India. It was, therefore, a severe blow to Sastri when the British Government suddenly deve-

loped a very deep concern for his health and decided to drop him out of the list of invitees to the Third Round Table Conference. Some two weeks before this decision was announced Lord Willingdon offered Sastri the position of the President of the Council of State in succession to Moncrieff Smith. This was obviously intended as a consolation prize, offered in advance, to soften the coming blow. Sastri replied that though he had no aversion to office under the Crown when it gave real opportunities of service to the people of India, he was not satisfied that the Presidentship of the Council gave such a scope of service. He wrote :

“The Managing Council of my Society would have no hesitation in allowing a member, so to speak, to suspend his membership, provided circumstances warranted such an unusual course. After the fullest thought I am not persuaded that I can make out a case for the extraordinary act where the main attractions of the office, in the eye of the common man, are the ease, comfort and dignity of the occupant.”

In his next letter of 2nd November 1932, Lord Willingdon wrote to Sastri :—

“I want to ask you quite frankly what are your feelings about going over next month (to the R. T. C.). Hoare and I both feel that owing to your health we should not press you to go over; further than that, I feel that I must have some influential people over here to help me with their advice on the many points on which we shall be asked our opinion during the discussion in London. I should feel happy if I could have the advantage of your and C. P.’s advice during the weeks that are before us. We can influence the people at home. That I know, but I want all the backing I can get and I should like to feel that you were

here to help me. Send me a line please and tell me exactly what you feel on the matter."

Willingdon got what he wanted! For Sastri wrote back bluntly and told him 'exactly' what he felt on the matter :

"From press reports I gather the final list of members of the Conference is about to be published. It would appear the drastic reduction in number has made it impossible to find room for me. I confess I am disappointed. I have been carefully hoarding myself up for this culminating service to the country. My health too, feeble as it is, would have benefited by some stay in the English climate. However, one can only submit to the inevitable and I have enough philosophy to do it in proper spirit."

But Sastri also wrote to the Viceroy that he would, as desired by him, help the Government in the difficult and delicate task of negotiating a settlement with Gandhi and stipulated certain conditions.

It was obvious that the Tory Government dropped Sastri, Chintamani, Setalvad and some others, including the rulers of Bikaner and Bhopal, because they found them inconveniently strong. They also dropped Jinnah, presumably because of his 'elusiveness' of which Sir Samuel Hoare (Lord Templewood) has commented in his 'Nine Troubled Years' (p. 54).

The dropping of Sastri from the Third Round Table Conference caused wide disappointment in progressive circles in Britain. *The Manchester Guardian* (of October 24, 1931) wrote :—

"It will be a great regret to many in England and not least to English liberals, that indifferent health prevents Mr. Sastri from coming. His wisdom and suavity, not to speak of his unsurpassed eloquence have been so great a part of previous Round Table Conferences."

Later, when Sastri was not invited to London to give evidence before the Select Committee of Parliament, *The Spectator* wrote on April 28, 1933:

"For what inscrutable reason, I should like to know, has the name of Mr. Srinivasa Sastri been omitted from the list of Indians invited to co-operate with the Select Committee of the two Houses on Indian Reform? Fourteen years ago I asked Edwin Montagu—just when he was drafting the bill based on his proposals—what Indian public man he regarded as the ablest and most effective co-operator with this country. 'Sastri', he replied without a moment's hesitation and despite the tensions and frictions of the last half-a-dozen years I would make bold to say that there is no man in all India whose counsel and co-operation the Select Committee would seek with greater advantage. An article by his pen in a recent issue of his paper *The Servant of India*, shows how candid and at the same time how temperate his criticism is. Mr. Sastri was not invited to the Third Round Table Conference ostensibly on the grounds of his health and the same excuse presumably does service still. I have reason to know that, so far from being too ill to come, Mr. Sastri had been assiduously—and successfully—husbanding his strength to enable him to discharge what might have been the crowning task of his long career of public service. It is both foolish and unjust thus to disregard him."

The atmosphere of the Third Round Table Conference lacked hope and became rigidly conservative. The right wing Conservatives did everything they could to push the idea of immediate provincial autonomy and the postponement of Federation. Fissiparous tendencies among the Princes and British influence with them made many of the

ruling chiefs go back on the Federal idea. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru fought a brave battle at the Conference against these reactionary tendencies and insisted upon Federation with the least possible delay after the establishment of the new Constitution in the Provinces.

Throughout 1933, Sastri was in close touch with Mahatma Gandhi and was constantly persuading him to give up Civil Disobedience and seek a settlement with Government. Gandhi was in Yeravada Jail, Poona; Poona was the Headquarters of the Servants of India Society and so Sastri could meet Gandhi without drawing much publicity. On June 22, 1933 Srinivasa Sastri wrote to Venkatarama Sastri :—

“The Mahatma gave me a very long talk today. Mahadev Desai and a nephew were present. In about two weeks he will write to Lord Willingdon. He wishes me to address Hoare and Irwin so that they may advise Lord Willingdon not to turn the request down summarily. I do so by this post. Please keep this private. He is improving steadily.”

On the same day he wrote to Sir Samuel Hoare :—

“I have had some talks with Mahatma Gandhi. As soon as he is strong enough, he intends to write to the Viceroy and ask for an interview. There is some ground for fearing that the reply may be a refusal or so qualified as to amount to it. This would be most unfortunate. No one can be confident that the interview, if granted, would be attended with happy results. But from my knowledge of the Mahatma's present mind and of the complexion of the things in general, I have strong hope that, if the Viceroy and he talked together fully and freely, a more or less satisfactory settlement might be reached.”

He addressed a similar letter to Lord Irwin on the same

day. While Irwin's reply showed some concern to seek peace, Hoare's reply, though cordial, ended in a lofty tone :

"We go on with our great task, and, as you may imagine, it is not made easier by political differences either in India or Great Britain."

Sir Samuel Hoare's difficulties were of course great, especially with Churchill and the die-hard Conservatives. The Round Tablers sent Sastri good reports of Hoare's performance in the face of these difficulties. In a letter of 1st January 1933 to Gundappa, Sastri wrote : "Polak thinks not so badly of the R. T. C. He says Mirza is of like mind. Is that so ? Sir Samuel Hoare seems to have both broadened and softened in the end."

The Third R. T. C. closed after a sitting of only five weeks. In January, 1933 the Round Tablers were back in India and spoke hopefully of the results. In March 1933, the British Government formulated their proposals for Indian constitutional reforms in the form of a White Paper presented to the Houses of Parliament. Sastri examined them with his customary care and conscientiousness. He wrote and spoke, analysing the proposals, pointing out the defects and suggesting improvements. In a letter to Kodanda Rao, he wrote :

"It (the White Paper) is progressive in small ways. In essence it is anti-democratic and deliberately aims at keeping India weak, disunited, unable to act, and in Britain's leading-strings. I won't go so far as to say that in future it cannot be amended and made to subserve our purposes. It will be, that is certain. But not by any principle of evolution within it. The reforming power must come from outside. If I could stop the scheme coming, I would. But not all that

Gandhi and Nehru and Congress and we and other like-minded people can do will stop it."

Sastri watched from afar the drama of the Parliamentary proceedings on Hoare's motion, and could not withhold his praise for Sir Samuel's courage in standing cross-examination for several days together, for the thorough grasp he manifested of the Indian problem in all its aspects, and above all, for his combats with Churchill which assumed on occasions heroic proportions. Sastri also realised that it was not a heroic encounter of the ancient order where the hero stands for the just and the true. For, while Sir Samuel Hoare stood up for the White Paper, the only changes he made in it were in the direction of anti-Indian provisions.

The safeguards were too many and most of them were not in the interests of India. Over Defence and Finance, Indian control was negligible. The Governor General and Governors were given too many extraordinary powers and the accession of the Princes was left open until an Act "which will be the basis of the Princes' Association" was passed. Above all, the White Paper fought shy of the expression 'Dominion Status' and there was no phrase in it even approximating to it. And yet, Sastri was not for our rejecting the proposed new Constitution. The main reason for his stand was that in this sphere "there was no standing still" and that "if places are not filled by the right men they will be filled by the wrong men." Sastri had been urging upon Gandhi to let Congress free to try a new policy, 'aiming at constructive national good in legislation, finance and administration' which in his opinion, was long overdue. He wrote to him on September 4, 1933:

"'Victory or Nothing' is a rousing cry on the battlefield. When the day is lost, it has no meaning. Where legislatures exist, even such manacled legislatures as ours, much may be done, were it only to prevent evil

by vigilant opposition. It is first rate to be the Government. If you can't be that, the next best thing is to be a strong united opposition. Bacon said we must have our hands constantly in affairs, and he was a man of the world."

In the same letter he added :

"It is my heart's wish that Congress and Liberals and others similarly devoted to the cause of the future nation should merge together and form one large party. But the idea is too good for the moment. We must be content to have these parties, with their several lables but co-operating for common purposes, as clearly defined as possible."

In January 1934, Sastri delivered two lectures on "The White Paper Constitution" at the Ranade Hall, Mylapore. He was unsparing in his criticism of the coming Constitution. But at the same time he wanted the Congress and other progressive parties to capture the legislatures and work the Constitution. He fervently declared :

"It is when trouble is acute, when the difficulties are greatest, that is to say, though it seems hard to say it, when the Constitution is the worst, it is then that the duty of the citizen to perform all his functions is most strong. If I realise my duty, it is just the time when I should not close my eyes, when I should not fold my arms and when I should not shut up my brain in inactivity. It is a challenge to whatever is best, most active and most efficient in me."

He struck a note of warning against the best men of the country standing too long away from practical politics and administration :

"Affairs, especially political, and public affairs, are a special department of study. Those who refuse for

several years to be connected with them will find afterwards, when they resume normal life, that it is a very difficult process to get into efficient and profitable touch with them."

In June 1934, Sastri's wife, Lakshmi, passed away leaving him desolate. He wrote to one of his dearest friends, A. Krishnaswami Aiyer :

"It is six days now ! I shall no doubt learn to do without her while I live yet. It is a wonder I have only once called her by name since. I should do so a thousand times daily."

He said of his wife whose understanding and sacrifice were great :

"She bore no grudge, she did no harm. So far as I could see, my relations cherished her and my friends honoured her. In matters that came within her range, her instinct was sound and her judgement trustworthy.

"Her daughter and her grandchildren she loved with a measureless love ; for me she had a feeling as for a God. Often she taught me to be just and forgiving. Hard as it may be to believe, she guarded my good name as her own and kept me from thoughts and deeds that might have injured it—well, she was too good and too noble for me. Now and hereafter I hope her memory will keep me straight."

CHAPTER XVIII

VICE-CHANCELLOR, ANNAMALAI UNIVERSITY

The sadness of his wife's death, advancing age and failing health compelled Sastri to seek retirement from public life to settle in the city, which he loved so much, Bangalore. In the congenial climate of the beautiful city, and with the encouragement and help of his dear friend D. V. Gundappa, Sastri prepared the Mysore University Extension Lectures on Gokhale which he was to deliver. In January 1935, he delivered three lectures on Gokhale in Bangalore and also in Mysore, both under the auspices of the Mysore University. Like the *Kamala Lectures*, they were a triumph of sustained extempore speaking. Of the Lectures, Sastri wrote to a dear friend :—

“Here I have just finished a trilogy on Gokhale. I spoke for an hour and a half each day to an audience which was 3,000 the first day, 4,000 the second, and 5,000 the third. The attention I commanded was so profound, I felt flattered and proud. I had no notes. The Vice-Chancellor was struck dumb with astonishment and read a three minutes' praise of me, calling my performance a *tour de force*. To me the greatest wonder was that I felt neither pain nor exhaustion. I felt and said I was performing a sacred duty like a parent's obsequies and was therefore immune from disease or infirmity.”

Indeed, a spirit of worshipful reverence breathed through these lectures, and we catch something of the exalted spirit that actuated Gokhale, the high ideals that he cherished, the humble and devout manner in which he gave of his best in

the service of his high ideals and pursuit of his high principles.

Sastri was preparing to lead a life of rest and contemplation, chewing the cud of his long, varied and distinguished life and experience, when his life-long friend and admirer Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar requested him to become the Vice-Chancellor of the Annamalai University. It may be recalled that Sastri was actually appointed the first Vice-Chancellor of the University in 1929 and that he could not accept the appointment owing to his deputation to Kenya. When the Raja renewed the request in 1935, Sastri accepted it, not without some hesitation. He took a modest honorarium instead of the statutory salary of the office. Soon the high calling of educationist and educator enthralled Sastri. Though as Vice-Chancellor, he could have confined himself to administrative work, he took part in teaching which was his first and last love. For, he longed to impart to the young some of the knowledge and wisdom that he had gathered from his varied experiences in different parts of the world. The Pro-Chancellor, Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar, reposed abundant confidence in him and this was a source of deep satisfaction to Sastri. At the end of his first term of three years, Sastri wrote to Raja Sir Annamalai Chettiar conveying his feelings in language remarkable for its combination of gratitude with dignity :

“For your part you gave me the fullest confidence. You upheld my decisions, you endorsed my judgments, you accepted my recommendations in the most unhesitating manner. Such treatment, suggesting no trace of superiority or inferiority of status, but based on mutual co-operation and support, I enjoyed as Agent in South Africa at the hands of Lord Irwin and Sir Muhammad Habibullah. On any other terms I should have felt office an intolerable and humiliating yoke. You are

one of the few people who can, when they choose, treat their agent as though he were, not a receiver, but a conferrer, of favour.

“Above all, in your personal behaviour, you have shown a deference of manner and solicitude for my susceptibilities which have left me speechless with gratitude and frequently cause me embarrassment.

Is it a wonder that I lay down the Vice-Chancellor's rank and office with regret? The duties and responsibilities, the buildings, the staff and the students, these have in their several ways become a part of my life, and I shall miss them sorely in my isolation.”

Sastri was spared the pang of separation from the University. For, the Raja requested him to continue for another term as Vice-Chancellor which he gladly did.

In November 1936, Sastri was away from Annamalai University for about a month as the sole delegate of the Government of India to Malaya to enquire into the conditions of Indian labour in that country. He wrote to the Servants of India Society for permission to undertake the mission and said :—

“It didn't occur to me to ask whether it would be easy or hard work, up to or beneath my dignity. I merely stipulated that it should be honorary and that my son should be allowed to accompany me as Private Secretary.

“I have glided into this business without deliberation. It isn't dishonourable, it isn't for private profit, it isn't communal or anti-national. It is the service of our people, similar in kind though perhaps not in prestige or opportunity, to missions undertaken by our members in the past. What more to recommend it? Rather what was there to *discommend* it? My personal rank or dignity is irrelevant.”

Sastri arrived in Rangoon on his way to Malaya at the beginning of December 1936. The unfortunate and sudden illness of his son Sankaran who had to be operated upon for appendicitis delayed him for a week in Rangoon. "More than Sankaran's stamina under operation," wrote Sastri in a private letter, "my strength causes me surprise. In great excitement and pain, I have kept my head, and looked after everything. I wouldn't willingly go through it again but I am calmer and more collected than I knew. Bozman* trembled for me that awful night. Lord, it is now all behind!"

After an extensive tour during which visits were made to some 30 rubber estates, Sastri submitted a report commenting favourably on the conditions of Indian labour in Malaya and recommending that emigration by Indian labour to Malaya should continue with some stipulations with regard to increased wages and better amenities which he indicated. While Sastri's report was received favourably in India, the Malayan Indian Press was critical of it. Indian leaders in Malaya wanted that further emigration of labour from India should be stopped so that the position of the Indians already settled in Malaya would be secure and prosperous. Explaining his stand Sastri wrote to Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai, Member of the Viceroy's Council :—

"My critics say I have discovered in Malaya a paradise for Indian labour. I don't make any such egregious claim. But I maintain that our labour profits in every conceivable respect by being allowed to emigrate to Malaya; and it is a sin on our part, besides being a most silly bargain, to deny tens of thousands of labourers their chance in life in order to get half a dozen educated men decent employment.....

* Member of the Viceroy's Council who accompanied Sastri as Adviser.

"The right to emigrate is an attribute of high-grade citizenship, and I would not sacrifice it lightly or even suspend it for long and indefinite periods

"History proclaims that at an early period we built ships, moved freely on the waters and founded colonies that lasted for centuries."

Sastri's second term as Vice-Chancellor of the Annamalai University was marred by a prolonged students' strike. Though the immediate provocation was a clash between two students, the strike was really due to the disaffection caused among some students by the infiltration of anti-social ideologies which roused the ambition of some student leaders for sway over their fellow-students. I was one of the lecturers of the University at the time and witnessed the rapidity with which the disaffection spread even amongst the more promising scholars. Sastri handled the situation in a truly non-violent manner and in all the prolonged and tortuous agony of the struggle which now and again assumed threatening proportions, Sastri saw to it that the police had never even to lift a hand against anyone. In fact, many blamed Sastri for not taking strong action but he knew that the better way was one of patience and forbearance. On the other hand, the then Chief Minister of Madras, Shri C. Rajagopalachari, advised Sastri to excuse *all* the rebels and, to use his own words, "take the risk of being deceived." Though Sastri believed in generosity and trust, he felt that he could not go so far as to admit those who had proved by their repeated conduct to be a disturbing and disaffecting influence. Sastri wrote to Rajagopalachari :

"More than once I solemnly assured the bulk of the students (and their guardians) that they would be protected from the unsettling influences and the infection of subversive ideas. To re-admit the students who are the original and continuing causes of the trouble is

to refuse the promised protection and expose them once more to danger.

"The public will not and cannot understand the action of the University authorities; and the reputation of the University, already damaged, will be nearly wrecked. The policy of unreserved generosity would be proper if my personal interests were alone at stake. I am responsible for a large institution which is not my private property.

"You say you trust those students; I don't. I have known them; you have not. I have suffered from their misconduct; you have not. I have means of judging of their future intentions towards their University; you have not.

"You add : 'Sack them if after this chance they misbehave'. Suppose they do misbehave and I sack them, how may I explain myself to the public ? May I say I knew this would happen but gave the chance against my better judgement to please others? What will the public say of a man who surrenders his experienced judgement in a crisis and allows a big place of education to be dislocated and deprived of its morale ?"

Though pressed by friends and colleagues to write to Mahatma Gandhi, Sastri did not wish to take his troubles to such high quarters. In the height of the strike and Sastri's mental and physical suffering, Mahatma Gandhi who came to know of the strike sent a telegram to the strikers advising obedience to Sastri. He also sent a telegram to Sastri : "May heart goes out to you. I pity the students who have been unworthy of your great stewardship". Sastri wired back in the fulness of gratitude : "Magnanimity, Thy name is Gandhi !" But even Gandhiji's telegram did not bring about the cessation of the strike. It was the final and

unequivocal advice of the Chief Minister Rajagopalachari to the rebel students that brought about the end of the strike. It was a comfort to Sastri that the strike ended with the minimum possible punishment on the minimum number of strikers.

One of the rebels happened to be a son of a dear friend of Sastri, Mrs. Naidu of South Africa, who had been sent to the Annamalai University specially because Sastri was the Vice-Chancellor. This attractive and popular student, Gopalan, threw himself into the fray misapplying his energy and capacity. Mrs. Naidu along with her husband had taken part in the passive resistance movement of Gandhi and she now sought the intervention of Gandhi in favour of her son. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur wrote to Sastri conveying Mrs. Naidu's grief. Sastri wrote to Amrit Kaur explaining that it had not been possible to grant Mrs. Naidu's request :

"Mrs. Naidu has had another letter from me. In it I told her of Gopalan's final severance from the University. The story he has told her of reconciliation with his *gurus* and amicable settlement of the trouble has no resemblance to the facts. Throughout the episode the rebels resented our communicating with their guardians and contradicted our representations by reassuring narratives of their own, calculated to lull all suspicions and fears.

"We judged it beneath our status to counteract propaganda by propaganda. In this we relied too much on the good sense of the parents and public. They believed *all* that the students said, and judgement went by default. Some Congress members of the Legislature became the students' champions and the inevitable communal jealousy added itself to the forces ranged against us. The Mahatma's intercession struck them with fear,

but the effect was momentary. Foul calumnies obtained credence, I am ashamed to say, and I was by no means exempt. Rajaji stood by us gallantly, tho' he thought and thinks I might have been thorough in my generosity and not excluded any one from clemency. With no desire—I say it after rigorous self-examination—to be vindictive, I couldn't go quite so far."

Gopalan wrote to Sastri from Ceylon saying that he would turn over a new leaf and pursue his education in Ceylon. Sastri wrote to him a remarkable letter full of the grandeur of his nobility and compassion for the erring :

"When you think of the recent events calmly under your mother's roof, the perspective will change marvelously, and many of those with whom you came into contact will appear in a different character from what they were. Some may gain and some may lose by the change. For all of them I plead, as indeed I would plead for you, that circumstances make sport of us and none is fully master of thoughts and deeds. We, the best, no less than the worst, need mercy and charity.

"Please convey to your mother my good wishes and assure her that, while I have been unable to grant her request and therefore have added to her distress, I have not been guilty of thoughtlessness or malice.

"Trusting that the future will be kind to both of you."

Sastri felt the infirmities of age and resigned his Vice-Chancellorship in March 1940 after two years of his second term. He left the University sound and stable, fully recovered from the effects of the strike.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LAST YEARS

If Sastri disapproved of the stringent safeguards that disfigured the Constitution of India passed by the British Parliament in August 1935, he equally disapproved of the refusal of the Congress to accept office and use the powers that were offered under that Constitution to promote further constitutional advances by gaining more authority with the British Government through efficiency and success in working the new Reform. For, Sastri had always the firm belief that it was a suicidal policy for the best men and women of a nation to stand aside from Government and to refuse to practise administration which is one of the greatest arts. He held that the Congress had stayed too long in the wilderness and that the whole future of India turned upon whether it threw itself into the elections with a view to capture power, assume responsibility, develop its political muscle and forge the unity of the nation. Delay was dangerous. For, though the Government of India Act was passed the British Government were not enthusiastic about introducing responsibility at the Centre. Moreover, the enthusiasm of the princes to have an All-India Federation had cooled down. The Congress, however, refused to accept the new Reform and demanded a Constituent Assembly to frame the Constitution.

With the elections in British India to the various provincial legislatures that took place in the early part of 1937 a bright prospect opened. The Congress secured a majority in many provinces, but it refused to take office unless a specific assurance was given by the Viceroy that the Governors would not use their powers of interference or set aside the advice of ministers. When the Congress refused

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to accept office in the provinces in which they commanded a majority in the Legislatures, interim ministries of persons belonging to other parties were formed. In Madras, Sastri was invited to head the interim ministry. He declined to do so. Events soon so shaped themselves that the Congress assumed office in six provinces. For, the Viceroy later gave the assurance that the Governors would not interfere with the day-to-day administration of Government and that a Governor "will at all times be concerned to carry his ministers with him." Sastri rejoiced at the formation of the Congress Ministries and welcomed them with a jubilation that surprised Congressmen and annoyed some of his fellow-Liberals. When C. Rajagopalachari, the Chief Minister of Madras proposed modest salaries for his ministers, Sastri lauded their sacrifice and went to the length of describing himself "as a timid and humble freshman from the University of self-denial as compared with the Congress Ministers who had taken the Doctorate degree."

Sastri was nominated to the Upper Chamber, the Legislative Council. Naturally he became the Leader of the Opposition and served the people with outspoken and vigorous criticism of the Government, seasoned always by charity of judgement and courtesy of expression. He was very keen that Congress administration should lay firmly the foundations of democratic procedure in our country. He was, therefore, distressed when he found a lamentable tendency in the Congress organisation which led the High Command of the Congress to centralise authority and influence the Congress Ministries in the provinces in their day-to-day administration. He felt that his sympathy with the Congress Ministry and his joy that at long last there was a really popular Government should not deter him from pointing out the danger while still it was incipient. Both in the Legislature and on the public platform Sastri made

pronouncements deprecating party politics which would do away with independence of judgement and compel people to speak, act and vote at some one else's bidding. When the Congress Ministry in Madras was in a hurry to push its bills through the Legislature with its steam-roller majority, Sastri protested that the opposition deserved more consideration and better hearing. On one occasion he received thunderous applause in the Legislative Council when he said that even Sir Muhammad Usman (of gargantuan size) with "many a genuflexion of his magnificent frame" pleaded in vain with the Chief Minister to give more time for the consideration of a Bill ! He had a deep sympathy with the Prohibition Policy of Rajagopalachari, though with his usual caution he wanted the scheme to be tried out in select areas in the beginning. He was emphatic, however, that there could be no two opinions on the soundness of Prohibition and its wholly benevolent character. With regard to Basic Education and Hindi, however, he wanted them to be tried out carefully as experiments before they were extended on a wide scale. Perhaps his most famous speech in the Legislative Council of those days was when he denounced the procedure which Government had adopted of first throwing open the Madurai temple to Harijans and then passing a legislation with retrospective effect. In spite of his age and his onerous duties as Vice-Chancellor, Sastri took a most active part in the discussions of the Legislative Council and added to it the distinction of his illustrious personality, rich experience, and wise counsel.

The war clouds were gathering over Europe in 1938. Britain and France tried their best to avoid a conflict with Germany and made various concessions to conciliate Hitler. Chamberlain and Halifax were following the policy of appeasing the Nazis. When Hitler attacked Czechoslovakia and

the brave people had to face near extinction as an independent nation, Sastri was sad beyond measure. Yet he thought that there was wisdom in the policy that Chamberlain and Halifax followed. In a letter of October 4, 1938, Sastri wrote :

“The world is going mad, I never was so perplexed in my life as now. Do I want peace or war? Peace. Then why am I not pleased? Because of the extinction (it will be that soon) of Czechoslovakia. Did I expect peace in a Hitler-ridden world without some iniquity? If I did, I was a fool. Much as I disliked Halifax when he said : ‘Peace is at this juncture greater to the world than justice’, I don’t dislike him nearly so much now. Peace is something more tangible, at least in its negative aspects, than justice, far more clearly discernible. Who would sacrifice a clear tangible end for a mere abstraction which means different things to different nations and different individuals? This Peace, however, cannot last long. Some people would ask: ‘Since we must fight some day, why not now? It may be better now than tomorrow.’ The answer is that of the doctor in the case of the dying man. He cannot say : ‘Since the patient is sure to die in three days, why not finish him now? So much bother is saved.’ The idea is, God’s ways are inscrutable. Nothing is certain. If we gain time, who knows? Mankind may change its ways, the nations may learn the wisdom of peace, and all quarrels will yield to reason.”

Britain, however, had to declare war on Germany early in 1939, when Hitler attacked Poland. The British Government involved India in the War without consulting the Legislature and this action was naturally resented by the Congress and all other progressive parties in India.

Mahatma Gandhi's first reaction to Britain entering into the war was one of unreserved generosity and sympathy. In his interview with the Viceroy he told him that he could not contemplate without being stirred to his very depths the possible destruction of London, the Houses of Parliament and the Westminster Abbey. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru hurried back from China and declared that the Congress was not out to bargain and that he should like India to play her full part and throw all her resources into the War. However, Gandhi could not carry the Working Committee of the Congress with him when it met on September 15, 1939. Gandhi's position was difficult. Indeed he was on the horns of a dilemma. He was groping for light and searching for truth. Sastri who had always believed that Gandhi's faith in non-violence was absolute, was puzzled and grieved by Gandhi's part at the meeting of the Working Committee of the Congress on September 15, 1939, and his statements following that meeting. In his opinion Gandhi's position amounted to his disowning of violence for himself but commendation of it to the Working Committee. Sastri had occasion to discuss the matter with Mahadev Desai when he was in Madras a few days after the meeting of the Committee. When Mahadev Desai explained Gandhi's difficulties, Sastri was impatient with him and spoke with what Mahadev Desai called "affectionate vehemence": "Your Gandhi is less than mine. I have no use for such a Gandhi. If he cannot live up to his high doctrine, let him cut his throat." In a letter of September 22, 1939 (his 71st birthday) Sastri apologized for the vehemence of his remarks in a letter to Mahadev Desai and said "Vehemence is my weakness, in extenuation of which I shall only plead that my bark is worse than my bite." In the same letter, he recurred to his perplexity that Gandhi

should disown violence for himself but commend it to the Working Committee. He wrote:—

“The matter seems to have deeper stratum. It lies in a thicket of casuistry and I own I am lost. What was Gandhi’s difference with the W. C. C. which caused him so much grief? Was it their apostasy in respect of non-violence? Or was it their refusal to offer co-operation to Great Britain without bargaining terms? The text of his statement in the opening sentence, would seem to favour the second interpretation. If so, are we to understand that, before he came to the W. C. C. meeting, he had made up his mind to advise co-operation in the war? To plead that his co-operation with violence was to be non-violent is a poor defence. Non-violent violence beats me! Pandit Nehru and the W. C. C. would not be content with this anaemic simulacrum of support if Britain complied with their demand and promised India her Freedom.”

In the same letter he continued :

“In the not improbable event of India being a theatre of war, is Gandhi prepared to advise his countrymen to bare their breasts to the enemy’s sword? A little while ago, I would have pledged my word he would do so, but I am not confident any more.”

In the *Harijan* of September 30, 1939, Gandhiji made a reference to Sastri’s letter to Desai:—

“A friend between whom and me there never is any mental reservation, thus writes in anguish rather than anger : ‘In the not improbable....., but I am not confident any more.’ I can only assure him that, notwithstanding my recent writings, he can retain his confidence, that I would give the same advice as he expects I would have given before, or as I gave to the Czechs and Abyssinians. My non-violence is made of

sterner stuff. It is firmer than the firmest metal known to the scientists. Yes, alas! I am painfully conscious of the fact that it has still not attained its native firmness."

When in 1940, Gandhi proclaimed again the non-violence, doctrine "unadulterated and pure", Sastri rejoiced. He wrote to the Mahatma a long letter compounded of worshipful reverence, lofty reasoning and keen criticism ;

"Those that place ethical values above all other values must have great satisfaction to see you at last disentangling yourself from this Serbonian bog. It is a noble enterprise, when one comes to think of it calmly to make divinity out of human clay. Failure in it is noble too. In arithmetic zero is zero. In human affairs, on the contrary, transactions of immense magnitude may end in zero, but have not been fruitless. Experience, wisdom, proved strength are enormous gains, though for the moment we seem like Sisyphus, doomed to roll up the stone again from the bottom. Go on, brave soul, your faith is inextinguishable, it is not of this earth.....

"Don't complain that I hold you rigidly to the letter of a particularly hard rule of conduct, sharp as a sword's edge. Some friends defend you on the footing—rather beneath you—that you are a politician, above other politicians in aim and method and achievement, but still a politician limited by the very nature of politics. I judge you as a saint who has the gift of seeing truth and the courage to experiment with it—and in the experiment has had more success than most saints so called. That is why I rejoiced in your enunciation and proclamation of the non-violence doctrine, unadulterated and pure, though the philistine world jeered. Nor can you put me off by an outburst of your humi-

lity and confession of inconsistency, weakness, corruption of the soul and so on. This only exalts you the more in my hero-worshipping mind, making your merits the more lustrous and your blemishes, alas, the more glaring. I place you alongside the philosophers and ethicists of fame. The pursuit of abstract thought and the practice of austerities belong to us in India by heredity. To see you descend on occasions from the heights, I feel bereft of my natural garment, disrobed of my national pride."

Jumping with marvellous agility from the *Paramarthika* plane to the *Vyavaharika* plane (a feat of which he accuses Gandhi in this very letter!) he discusses the political situation with Gandhi and says :

"It is the clear duty now of the strongest and the most patriotic party to grasp at every opportunity of acquiring power and using it for the protection of the people, subordinating and postponing for the moment all other considerations, including independence."

Sastri ends the letter with an 'outburst of humility' :

"Finally, I ask forgiveness for the freedom with which I have set forth my views. Like a teacher I have no doubt laboured the obvious. Like an irresponsible critic I have alternately found fault and exhorted. Like an anxious son of India I have perhaps painted a lurid picture and alarmed you unnecessarily. Put down these lapses partly to ignorance and partly to overwrought nerves."

For all his worship of Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence and his insistence that Gandhi should be wholly true to his creed, Sastri himself became a member of the Madras War Committee and paid Rs. 100/- towards the war fund. He attended the inaugural meeting of this committee but came away in the middle of it after protesting against some anti-

Gandhi and anti-Congress speeches. Sastri's membership of the War Committee appeared strange and inconsistent to those who followed his high controversy with the Mahatma, but Sastri's defence was that he was not like the Mahatma an apostle of non-violence but only a lover of peace, and that he considered Britain's victory essential for the survival of democracy. The Servants of India Society decided that its members should not join war committees and so Sastri became guilty of indiscipline. In view of his seniority, it was winked at! Indeed his colleagues of the Society treated him with great deference and affection.

Another question on which Sastri took a different view from that of many members of the S. I. S. including Pandit Kunzru, the President of the Society, was the issue of Pakistan. While these members held that conceding Pakistan was the only practicable proposition to win freedom for India, Sastri was wholly against the division of India. It went completely against his boyhood's dreams and manhood's striving. Weak as he was, he wrote and spoke against the creation of Pakistan as much as he could. His very last letter from his death bed was to Mahatma Gandhi imploring him not to accept the idea of Pakistan. He said in that letter :—

“The Punjab and Bengal would be ruined and blast your memory if you gave them up. Do not let any part of India go out and become independent. It is bound to be a lasting enemy and a blistering sore to India.”

Sastri did not live to see the division of India and was spared the pangs of Partition.

Sastri watched with eager hope the negotiations that were carried on by the Viceroy with the Congress with a view to gather popular support to the war effort. The ‘August offer’ of 1940 of the Viceroy was rejected by the

Congress and Gandhiji launched 'individual satyagraha' to be offered by a chosen few. In March 1942, the British Government sent out to India Sir Stafford Cripps with proposals which envisaged the formation of an Indian Union with full Dominion Status after the War, and during the War the formation of a National Government representative of the main elements of Indian public life but responsible to the Viceroy and not to the Legislature. Sastri regretted that in spite of Cripps's well-known sympathy with Indian aspirations, he failed to get agreement. In August 1942, the All-India Congress Committee passed the "Quit India" resolution which was followed by the imprisonment of Gandhi, Nehru and other leaders of the Congress. During these days, Sastri became filled with one longing—to see betimes the establishment of a National Government supported by the Congress in order that India might make its weight felt at the Peace Conference that was bound to come soon enough and the authentic voice of 'Ahimsa' and 'Santhi' might be heard at the Conference from the apostle of non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi. So overwrought was his imagination on the momentous issue of the Peace Conference that was to come that Sastri did what a statesman of his stature ordinarily does not do—he wrote open letters in the press to Mr. Amery, the Secretary of State, to Lord Wavel, the Viceroy and to Mahatma Gandhi (who was in gaol). These letters which were published on the 24th October, 1943, are no mere literary exercise but the passionate outpouring of the feelings of a great patriot and a true citizen of the world. In his letter to Mr. Amery he said :

“Demand not of our revered leaders that they stand with tears in their eyes at the gates of the Viceroy's palace and strike penitential palms on aching cheeks. Play the part of the magnanimous victor and the heal-

ing statesman. Do not, I adjure you, sow dragon's teeth on the ancient and hallowed soil of this country."

To the Viceroy he said :

"Government by Section 93 must end and the legislatures must be restored to their normal function. As nearly as may be consistent with the requirements of the war, the Centre must be endowed with the authority and prestige that betoken in the eyes of the world the early attainment of Dominionhood, so that our representatives may hold up their heads, whether at the Imperial Conference or at the World's Peace Conference as the recognised equals of the representatives of Great Britain, Canada, Australia and South Africa. This is a change of great magnitude and will require unintermittent and devoted labour, even if begun tomorrow. And it must be begun tomorrow. For the sun of armistice may suddenly burst through the cloud of war, brightening the plane and calling upon the nations to tackle the hundred problems of peace."

His letter to Gandhi was full of anguish and aspiration. In the course of the letter Sastri said:

"Dear brother, an opportunity has come, the like of which never was and never will be for generations. At the ensuing Peace Conference, which may meet sooner than most people expect, the afflicted nations will seek ardently for brave and honoured advocates of justice, equality and brotherhood without distinction of race, colour or religion. You must be there. Who, if not you? War must be banished for ever from the earth and all possibility of its recurrence provided against so far as it can be provided against by human foresight. Would you be missing on that supreme occasion? No, a thousand times No. Pacifism, non-violence, *ahimsa*—whenever and where-

ever these words are pronounced, the name of Gandhi will occur to the minds of people all over the earth. What should keep you from bearing irrefragable witness to the truth that you have ever cherished in your heart, the truth that must resound through the ages when your body has perished? After several humiliations due to association with earthly causes, the hour of exaltation approaches you. I see you, Great Soul, in a vision of glory, go up the Mount of Expectancy of a weary, waiting world, raise high the right hand of blessing and solemnly utter the word which is in all hearts and which comes full of hope and full of meaning from your inspired lips."

In May 1944 Government released Gandhiji for reasons of health. Sastri wrote a number of letters to Mahatma Gandhi urging him to put his weight against the idea of Pakistan. He also passionately pressed his suit that the Mahatma should make his way to the future Peace Conference. In his letter of June 2, 1944 to Mahatma Gandhi he wrote :

"The greatest event to happen in the remaining days of your life will be the World Conference of Peace. You must attend it. If they won't let you go as the representative of India, you must go still. To the good and true men at the peace table your name will be sufficient credential.....

"No doubt it would be a giant's strength to be armed with the Government of India's authority. Whether they made you the delegation's leader or not, you would be looked up to as leader."

Sastri was so intensely earnest on Gandhiji's going to the Peace Conference that he importuned G. D. Birla to persuade the Mahatma and to make all the necessary arrangements

for his journey to the Peace Conference. He kept on urging with the Mahatma :—

“The Peace Conference is of the greatest significance for the world, for India, and for your special mission in life.”

But Gandhiji was in no mood to respond to Sastri's appeal, though he was deeply touched by it.

Though in his last years Sastri was disturbed with forebodings of the disaster that might fall upon India owing to the threatened creation of Pakistan, these years were on the whole filled with a glow of satisfaction born of ripeness. With a memory that loved to dwell on great personalities and great events, he wrote and spoke on Dadabhai Naoroji, Ranade, Pherozeshah Mehta, Dinshaw Wacha, Annie Besant, V. Krishnaswami Aiyar and other illustrious figures of his day. He wrote his reminiscences in Tamil to the *Swadesamitran* which were immensely popular. When I collected his letters and Rochhouse & Sons, Madras, published them in 1944 he was immensely pleased and exclaimed in a letter to me, “What a great event!” It was in these mellow years that he delivered his lectures on the *Ramayana*. Indeed, it is amazing how much of his best writing and speaking was done during these last years. He broadcast many speeches over the radio. He wrote in Tamil with a new passion for expression through the mother tongue.

Sastri had also the satisfaction of winning the affection and reverence of the younger generation in an increasing measure as well as basking in the warm affection of friends of his own age. He wrote in a letter from Poona on February 21, 1942 :—

“Allow me to mention one element of satisfaction that I feel during this sojourn. I didn't feel it so pronouncedly ever before. People here show by their

behaviour a tenderness mingled with respect that was not noticeable till now. Is it that I was unobservant hitherto or that it is a new feeling of theirs caused by my age and somewhat unusual experience? The crowd on the 19th at Gokhale Hall was, they say, unprecedented for size and distinction. They regard me as a relic of a school of politics remarkable for their earnestness, knowledge and sagacity."

Towards the very end of life Sastri had the supreme blessing of being visited by Mahatma Gandhi during the latter's sojourn in Madras in January-February of 1946. Sastri was very ill and undergoing treatment at the General Hospital. Within a day of his arrival in Madras, Gandhi went to see him. Sastri who had almost given up hope of surviving till Gandhi's visit to Madras was nearly choked with emotion at the joy of meeting him. Gandhi met Sastri a second time and a third time, too. I had the good fortune of being present at the second and third meetings. The communion of these incomparable pair of friends had almost a divine beauty and tenderness. The second meeting was in some ways the most memorable. While Gandhi sat suffused with the glow of admiring love, Sastri bathed him in a torrent of worshipful affection. He was full of the *Ramayana*, quoted from it frequently comparing Gandhiji to Rama in jocular as well as serious vein. It was obvious that there was an unconscious but continuous identification in Sastri's mind of Gandhi with Rama. It was the *living Rama* who had come to him. When Gandhiji protested against comparisons with Rama and said "What nonsense, Sastri!" Sastri shook off his feebleness for a moment and his silvery voice rose "Ha! don't I know Gandhi, though you have come to me as my friend that you are the greatest fellow living in the world today?" Gandhi again remonstrated with a modesty all his own "What nonsense, Sastri!" He added in a tender

voice, "I have been doing many things here in Madras but these visits to you have given me the purest pleasure. I should spend longer hours with you, but for your doctors." Gandhi met Sastri again on his return from Madurai when he had only three hours at his disposal in Madras before entraining for Wardha. Sastri had returned home from the hospital and the meeting took place in his residence "Svagam". In this, which turned out to be his last meeting with Gandhi, Sastri was over-powered with emotion and struck a deeply personal note in his words to Gandhi : "Brother, you have done me exceptional honour, especially by paying this visit when you are in a great hurry. You are nearer and dearer to me than my own brothers, son, daughter and members of my family." Gasping for breath, he continued almost inaudibly : "We have come together by some inner affinity. No external reason can explain this friendship. Gokhale was but the occasion of it." He drew nearer to Gandhi and whispered, "I do not waste words, you know what I want to say."

The sands of time were running out for Sastri. He grew feebler day by day, but his mind was alert and his thoughts were more and more anxiously concerned with the unity of India and the peace of the world. The end was expected, but it came rather suddenly when it did. On the night of April 17, 1946, some of us were with him till 10-00 p.m., when he talked in cheer to us and to the members of his beloved family. He lost consciousness at about 10-15 p.m. and passed away at 10-35 p.m. There were many striking tributes from all over the world, but the tribute which his soul would have loved most was from his dearest friend and brother, Mahatma Gandhi :—

"Death has removed not only from us but from the world one of India's best sons. That he loved India passionately everyone who knew him could see. When

I saw him last in Madras, he could talk of nothing but India and her culture, for which he lived and died. I am sure he had no thought of himself even when he seemed to be on his death-bed. His Sanskrit learning was as great as, if not greater than, his English. I must not permit myself to say more save this that, though we differed in politics, our hearts were one, and I could never think that his patriotism was less than that of the tallest patriot. Sastri, the man, lives, though his body is reduced to ashes."

CHAPTER XX

EDUCATIONIST, ORATOR AND MAN OF LETTERS

All his life Srinivasa Sastri was a learner as well as a teacher. For, he believed in the ancient adage 'Learn in order to teach and teach in order to learn'. He learnt assiduously all his life but always bore his learning lightly. He was free from pedantry and pride of scholarship.

Of the mutual companionship of teacher and student, and of the joy of imparting knowledge to eager and aspiring students, Sastri has often written and spoken in glamorous terms. For, teaching was his greatest joy, whether as school-master, headmaster or Vice-Chancellor. Late in life, writing of the hermitages in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Sastri said:

"Ah, how I should love to learn and teach in those sanctuaries, *guru* and *sishya* bathing in safe pools together, chanting the Vedas aloud till the hills threw the sacred sounds back and the sylvan gods sat up and listened, our mutual companionship unperturbed by fear of lightning strikes or menacing processions or shootings by the king's police!"

He began teaching when he was 18 years old and quite a fresh graduate. "To be young was very heaven", and his work was marked by enthusiasm and delight. So eager was he to impart what he had gathered that he generally taught above the heads of his class. It was only after he had taken the teachers' training that he learnt to adjust what he taught to the level of his students. He always insisted on the necessity of training a teacher for his vocation through well-organised, well-staffed and well-equipped training schools and colleges.

Though Sastri was a great educationist who strove through life to present high ideals of education and to promote education in various capacities—as headmaster, educational journalist, member of University bodies, legislator, Agent General of the Government of India in South Africa, and Vice-Chancellor—he did not propound any new theory or formulate any novel scheme of education. Indeed, his approach to educational problems was in keeping with his general outlook which was one of reforming what we have, rather than fashioning something that is altogether new and revolutionary. It is this conservative, reformist attitude that made him insist in his speech at the Madras Legislative Council in March 1938 that the Wardha Scheme of Education as well as the introduction of Hindi in schools should be looked upon by the then Congress Government of Madras as experiments to be worked out carefully and assessed realistically. Sastri did not agree with the accusation that our educational system did nothing more than produce a race of clerks. He recognised that there was a constant need of improvement and believed that these improvements should be done after thorough consideration and in due consultation with the teaching profession. He often deplored that the one subject in which everyone felt competent to dabble was education. He firmly believed in the enlightenment which a liberal education produced. He said :

“Start high-grade technical and vocational institutions by all means. But start them well and with guarantees of efficiency secured by adequate finance. We have always demanded such institutions. But let us not delude ourselves with the hope that they will cure unemployment. Not improbably their graduates too will have to encounter enforced idleness, and in their case the evil will be more lamentable, not less, because

of the fewer remedies that are open. Unemployment is a most acute and distressing malady, and we are bound to devise measures to relieve it. But the measures must be calculated to achieve the end. Let us not in our vexation shut up colleges and schools. The undeveloped faculties, idle brains, and undirected energies of the young will become a danger to the community, a hundred times more difficult than the present unemployment. Not until industries and manufactures have been established on a large scale, and economic prosperity assured to coming generations, shall we be within sight of a sufficiency of jobs for our sons and daughters.”*

He did everything he could to promote women's education. He held that the object of woman's education was the same as that of man's and that she should be educated on lines similar to those of man with more or less the same curriculum. Men and women have a common destiny and it was futile to isolate woman from man in any context.

Sastri was throughout his life a stout champion of the teacher's rights as well as an eloquent exponent of his duties. In one of his early papers to the South Indian Teachers' Guild, he spoke of the high calling of the schoolmaster and his supreme importance in society. He insisted that teachers should be imbued with lofty idealism and irreproachable character so that they may be men of light and leading. He deplored the growth of communalism in education and held that national integrity would suffer on every occasion that we extended the principle of communal representation in the sphere of education. He was a fearless champion of “academic freedom”, the liberty of the University authorities to arrange their own affairs, which often is in danger from the grasping hand of bureaucracy. He also

* The Other Harmony—Pages 105;106.

warned that in an expanding democracy the sanctity of the temple of learning is subject to even greater danger from "sudden inroads of popular clamour and prejudice, miscalled public opinion".

Srinivasa Sastri will long be remembered as one of the world's great orators. Some of the greatest men of his day have paid the highest tribute to Sastri's oratory. Lord Balfour placed him as one of the five greatest orators of his times. The Master of Balliol, Mr. Smith, declared that he had never realised the beauty of the English language till he heard Sastri. Lady Lytton called him an artist in words. Sir Thomas Smart dubbed him "the Empire's silver-tongued orator". Lloyd George, Stanley Baldwin, and Dr. H. A. L. Fisher were some of the great men who made memorable pronouncements on Sastri's oratory. Baldwin said after one of Sastri's speeches, "I wish I had made that speech!". It is reported that the chief editor of the *London Herald* once cited to his staff Sastri as his authority for the particular pronunciation of a word in dispute.

A consummate master of the English language, his choice of words was unerring and his phrasing felicitous. He commanded the perfect ease of a master and his speech moved like the quiet and pellucid flow of a great river, now and then brimming to the full, but never overflowing the embankment. His pauses were as significant as his phrases. The spell of his cultured eloquence has left a lasting impression in Great Britain, in the Dominions, in the United States of America, in Geneva and in South Africa as well as in our own country. Those who heard Sastri enjoyed also his sense of humour, quiet and simple in essence and subtle in grain. There have been many eye-witness accounts of his great performances in the great assemblies of the world. They all testify to the magnetic charm of his personality and the magical effect of his superb oratory. They also refer

to his most impressive and effortless manner and the poise of his appearance that made one feel that his very body spoke. One account says:

"The first thing that strikes one is his poise. When called upon to speak, he rises in a deliberate effortless manner, and advancing a few steps, takes up a position from which he does not stir until his subject has been exhausted. He stands perfectly still—if there be a desk handy he will rest one hand thereon, otherwise both hands are simply forgotten, and drop by his sides. He stands straight up, and his perfect poise would be a great asset in an artist's model. He makes not a single movement—hardly a flicker of the eye-lid. It is a proud bearing, in the happiest sense of the word—not arrogant but conveying more the quality of dignity."

Indeed to those who have known Sastri's oratory, the verses in Valmiki's *Ramāyaṇa**, where Sri Rama, addressing Lakshmana, describes Hanuman's manner of speech, come readily to mind.

"He has the power of words, and he spoke words of sweetness and grace such as are suited to win friendliness. For him to speak as he has spoken he must be learned in the three Vedas (Rig, Yajur and Sama) and have them all at perfect command. Likewise he must have a thorough mastery of pronunciation, and be an adept at elocution. For, though he has delivered a long message, he did not commit a single flaw of utterance. He has an impressive posture while speaking, not making any displeasing movements with face, eyes, brows, head or other part of the body. He speaks neither too elaborately nor too briefly. His

*—Srimad Ramayana, Kishkindha Kanda, Sarga III, Shlokas 32 to 38.

words flow from his heart ; and with a full-throated ease, he speaks with a well-modulated voice, neither shouting nor speaking in a low tone. He deals adequately with his subject, with a due sense of proportion and considered arrangement of matter. He mouths words most gracefully so that his utterance seizes our heart. There is great art in his speech, all the three organs (throat, tongue and lips) that come into play in elocution being at his command. His speech wins my heart completely and delights my very soul. An ambassador who has such grace and beauty of speech can win even an enemy rushing towards him with an uplifted sword.”†

Sastri was as great a master of the music of the written word as he was of the melody of the spoken utterance. Indeed, he was a master of ‘the other harmony of prose’. P. S. Sivaswami Aiyar and C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar were among those who bewailed the modesty of Sastri that prevented him from giving the world masterpieces of English prose. Sastri’s defence was that he was not bursting with a message to give to the world. He remained till late in life an occasional writer. But these occasional writings were of the order of first-rate *belles-lettres*. His sketches and reminiscences of the great ones of the land are gems of literature. With the publication of ‘The Other Harmony’ containing some of the best prose of Sastri and ‘The Thumb-Nail Sketches’ of our great men beginning with Dadabhai Naoroji and ending with Tej Bahadur Sapru and C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, the reading public had an intellectual treat of a high order. The publication of his *Letters* marked, to use Sastri’s own words in a private letter, “a great event”. As P. S. Sivaswami Aiyar said, “There are other

†This translation attempted by me was touched up and published by Mr. D. V. Gundappa in his journal ‘Public Affairs’ in 1955.

orators, but Sastri is our only letter-writer". One reviewer, well-known for his scholarship and critical acumen, ranked the *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri* along with Mahatma Gandhi's "*My Experiments with Truth*" and Jawaharlal's *Autobiography* as a document of supreme human and political interest. "A sheer delight to read" was the comment of many a reader. Very recently an English friend wrote to me:

"The *Letters* were of absorbing interest to me and gave me enormous pleasure. They reveal a man of the greatest wisdom and compassion, who must rank very high, not only in India but in the whole world, as a liberal statesman and as a scholar, who followed humbly and unswervingly the path of integrity, reason and tolerance. The warmth of his personality stands out in every letter, whether to his daughter or to a Prime Minister."

In his last years, Sastri delivered a series of lectures on "Sir Pherozeshah Mehta and His Times". It is a great book filled with Sastri's rich experience of men and affairs and his ripe wisdom. No less a critic than the late K. Natarajan of the *Indian Social Reformer* said of this book: "It is an invaluable source book for future writers on the history of Indian politics in the last three quarters of a century."

Towards the very end of his life Sastri performed a long-cherished and pious task. He delivered a series of lectures on the *Ramayana* to devout and admiring audiences at the Sanskrit College, Mylapore. To the exposition of "this immortal product of the human mind" he brought all the wealth of his learning, penetrating insight into the hidden springs of human nature, and his impassioned love of the true and the beautiful. Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar* says that these lectures "constitute his

* *Indian Writings in English*—K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar (Asia Publishing House), Page 363.

major achievement as a humanist, as a scholar, and as an artist in words who wielded the English language with such ease and sureness and sense of purpose". He adds that "they reveal a Bradleyan sweep and subtlety of analysis and an utter mastery of the material".

Even in his first lecture, Sastri insisted that he was going to fix the attention on the main characters "as human beings that played their parts like human beings in circumstances that assail and confront human beings at every turn". He said:

"It appears to me, furthermore, that it is no act of impiety to study the *Ramayana* as an epic poem concerning human beings. It is an act, on the other hand, which gives to Valmiki his own due, establishes him as a man who held in his mind—assuming that he was the one that wrote the story—a clear, full-formed, full-blooded conception of men and women of superior ability and superior value to us, of superior moral stature. I would exhort you all to read the poem from this point of view."†

But it was clear that Sastri was not considering the *Ramayana* as he would consider a play of Shakespeare and that to him Rama and Sita were much more than literary characters. Sastri's piety broke out at every turn. On occasions, he broke down in tears, especially when he was narrating the grief and desolation of Sita and the harshness she had to face even from her beloved and adored Lord. The exaltation of *Dharma* above everything in this great epic possessed his whole being. Towards the close of the Lectures, Sastri dealt with the *Abhisheka* (coronation) ceremony without any religious ritual, but in his words there

† Lectures on the *Ramayana*, p. 7.

was a piety transcending any visible worship. He spoke in solemn and reverent tones to a hushed audience:

“We are all very happy indeed that this series of talks has ended in the *abhisheka*. But I should be false to myself if I close at this point without saying what is uppermost in my heart, that the real coronation is in our hearts. Rama and Sita should be crowned in our hearts, enthroned in our hearts. Let them govern your thoughts and regulate your lives. At all important times remember them, and then you cannot go wrong. This is not a sentimental closing, but I really feel that having studied the *Ramayana* together these months, we must make up our minds that that study will have its beneficial effect upon our lives and upon our nature. We have not studied this poem as a mere poem. We have studied it as a means of purifying our lives.”†

Sastri's homage to Rama and Sita was no less than that of Mahatma Gandhi.

† Lectures of the *Ramayana*, p. 455.

CHAPTER XXI

SASTRI THE MAN

Though born in a poor family, Srinivasa Sastri inherited an innate nobility of mind and aristocracy of the spirit as well as a subtle and penetrating intellect. His outward expression was a true reflection of the inner man. His handsome features and noble demeanour invested him with a winning charm and compelling majesty. Indeed, Nature fashioned him in one of its most lavish moods and fitted him for his high role as ambassador and statesman whose destiny it was "to win the applause of listening senates" in many parts of the world.

Sastri's character was of one piece ; it rang true in every sphere of life, private and public. He was a good and dutiful son, a loving husband and father and an affectionate brother and uncle. He loved his grand-children with infinite love. His domestic attachments were tender to a degree, and even when "the cruel seas" separated him for long periods from his near and dear, he always thought of the members of the large circle of his family with deep and touching concern and infinite solicitude for their welfare. He had also the satisfaction of enjoying the tenderest and most thoughtful affection from the many members of his family.

He was a loving and true friend, and like Gandhiji, had the faculty of keeping alive warm-hearted private relationships in the midst of public differences. He befriended the young and the poor and admitted them to equal intimacy with the elderly and the better-placed. He wrote to a friend who became a headmaster: "If you find a good man or two, cultivate them and don't be afraid if envious tongues say evil things of your curious friendship or lack of dignity."

To a young friend he wrote : "Talking of friendship, for which I have a morbidly keen eye, I noticed that the friendship between B and you is of the most attractive type. In the peak of enjoyment, my nature is to misgive. The Gods are jealous of human perfection, they are jealous even of our friendships. Look out! If you let business, care or illness keep you apart for some days, a barrier will arise between you."

From boyhood he believed in forgiveness and returning good for evil. To an audience of young scouts he narrated an instructive boyhood experience of his. When he was still in the Third Form (8th class) of his school he read a *sloka* in the *Hitopadesa* which enjoined returning gratefully good for good but biding your time and hitting hard those who have done you ill. The little boy said to himself : "Surely there is some error here." For, he was even then convinced that the better way was to return good for evil. In all his life, he never fell below this ideal. "With malice towards none" he had goodwill even to those who displayed animosity to him.

Sastri was singularly free from envy or jealousy. He was habitually magnanimous in his dealings with friend and foe alike. He was most generous in praise of others and was conspicuously free from political prejudice. He judged issues and persons strictly on their merits. He showed in his life that a politician could be a perfect gentleman. He radiated in every sphere of his life and activity "Sweetness and Light". Controversy and recrimination were foreign to his nature which, like his master Gokhale's, hungered for peace and harmony. He never replied to adverse criticism of a personal nature. "Least said soonest mended" was his motto. Conciliation and compromise were his watchwords, but not with evil or unmistakable mistakes. His insight and candour made him an incomparable guide for those

who sought light. It was this precious quality of unreserved candour that so endeared him to Mahatma Gandhi that he could write: 'Your criticism soothes me. Your silence makes me nervous.'

Sastri stood for understanding the other man's point of view. It was a banter of some of his friends that Sastri had the incurable habit of understanding the other man's point of view better than that of his own! A staunch liberal, he was averse to seeing always and only through liberal spectacles. His mind and spirit and indeed his whole nature and training were suited to play the role of a mediator and bring the healing touch of reconciliation. But, as Mirza Ismail said, "It was not in him to mediate between good and evil. To *mediate*, yes, between powers and peoples and creeds; that was his very nature, to understand and reconcile. But never without candour, never in condonation of radical evil."*

Srinivasa Sastri was entirely innocent of the wily arts and blandishments of ordinary politicians. He never formed shifty alliances or made doubtful compromises. The very idea of working with doubtful people for dubious ends was repugnant to him. It has been said of him that he never worked in team and that he ploughed a lonely furrow. This is only partially true. He was always prepared to work with others and subordinate his own role to that of following a good lead. For, he had neither ambition for leadership nor desire for fame, "that last infirmity of noble mind." He was modest and unambitious to the core. Fame came to him unsought even as obloquy came to him undeservedly. He wrote to me in June 1941 in one of his moods of perceptive self-revelation: "A diffident, ungrasping man is generally at a disadvantage; but luck has been friendly to me.

* In his Speech at the opening of the Srinivasa Sastri Hall in Madras, on May 15, 1955.

Good things have sought me, occasionally found me timid and hesitant. I have not actually run away from such opportunities ; conscience-stricken and scared, I have sat up and done my duty. But I was never eager, not at all ambitious and sadly deficient in the quality of adventure. If I sat at the table of the mighty, I was content to eat what I needed. I did not shout for the viands and costly wine and gorge myself. To speak the truth, I was every moment weighed down by the feeling that I had strayed out of bounds. I never settled down where I was stationed, but sat on the edge of the chair, ready to vacate if stared at questioningly by any steward. Conquerors must be made of sterner stuff."

Sastri's mind had both brilliance and depth and was supported by profound learning in Sanskrit and English. Dr. Johnson's words about Burke could well be applied to Sastri : "His stream of mind is perpetual." His intense powers of concentration in thinking of a problem did not slacken with age and infirmity. His was a brooding, creative thinking which saw a problem from every angle and analysed every facet of it. His intellectual illumination was matched only by his shining eloquence, even as his luminous wisdom was equalled only by his tender compassion.

Sastri believed in the worth and dignity of every individual. He was anxious never to offend the susceptibilities of an individual, however lowly or undeveloped he or she may be. Regimentation of opinion was repellant to him: He loved and encouraged freedom of opinion and action. Whenever it fell to his lot to exercise authority (a role which he did not fancy), he did it gently and with the utmost solicitude for the development of individual initiative and freedom. He wrote to a friend: "Your rules are good for the humdrum, sin-dreading type. The genius will break through them, however rigid. It is well he does. If the

rules be not rigid from the start several semi-geniuses will show themselves. That is why I am not a martinet. Not that I love order and discipline less, but that I love freedom more."

As a youth, Sastri acquired a rational outlook by his study of T.H. Huxley, J. S. Mill, Herbert Spencer and other exponents of science and its methods. He lost faith in the accustomed rituals and ceremonies. He developed a critical sense which demanded evidence and proof. But he was far from being a confident rationalist or disbeliever. Sastri has described vividly in *A Confession of Faith* the agony of his agnosticism. For, true agnosticism is a tragic and shattering frame of mind. Sastri says "Many agnostics attain a tranquillity of spirit which I envy. I am hagridden by the idea of nothing after death. I long in my inmost being, for some experience, some revelation, some authentic sign to bring the consolations of religion within my reach." La Place had a discussion with Napoleon the First about his system of Celestial Mechanics. The Emperor asked him, "What place have you given to God in your system?" "Sire," was the answer, "This is an hypothesis of which I have never felt the need." This proud and confident answer could never have been Sastri's.

Sastri went into the dock and called himself an agnostic, though a humble one, feeling a deep and passionate need of faith, but unable to satisfy this need. Sastri's agnosticism, if agnosticism it was, was no easy and shallow escape from the obligations and discipline of religion, but an earnest search, in fact a tragically earnest search, in which reason is pitted against faith. Sastri has described with a touching vividness this shattering conflict: "My heart revels with ineffable rapture in the last eight verses of the *Bhakti* chapter of *The Gita*. Their melodious rhetoric haunts me. Their lofty idealism penetrates my soul through and through. I do

not believe that, as a compendious code of ethics, it can be paralleled in the world's literature. When, however, I try to get hold of the various precepts, they fly heavenward and leave me disconsolate and prostrate. So I shift, like a drifting log, between resolution and paralysis of will, between hope and blank despair. The struggle between the head and heart described with self-revelatory pathos, in religious writing, rages perpetually within me. It is only my lifelong practice of self-control that cloaks the gnawings of my inmost being behind a bland expression of face.”*

As he grew older and was approaching death, his probings into the unknown, his questions and speculations regarding the fundamentals of life and death became more and more insistent. For, at a certain stage of life death is no longer a distant rumour but a near reality. Then, nothing really matters so much as the burning question, “Is there a life beyond death or shall I vanish like a bubble?” Some three years before his death Sastri broadcast a talk on, “Is Death The End?”. In this talk he said: “Not in the spirit of dogmatism, but with the humility of a truth-seeker do I reply. If the question means ‘Does the individual self persist as such after the body has perished?’, my answer is ‘No, there is not sufficient evidence’.” Almost exactly a year before he died he wrote in a letter on 16th April, 1945: “By tradition of race and family education and by force of example of friends, I long for the consolation of religion. But my intellect refuses to be convinced by the usual evidence in favour of the soul and a future world. So I am internally a man of unfulfilled longing and unhappy.”

Those who knew Sastri intimately could never think of him except as a man of deep and abiding faith. I once heard him speak of Harischandra as only a believer could. S. Satyamurti happened to say at a public meeting that Harischandra

* The Other Harmony, P. 4.

was a warning, rather than an example, against truth-telling at all costs. Sastri made an impassioned rejoinder, to which he referred in a letter as follows:—"The Harischandra legend has always exercised a powerful fascination over me. I was really shocked when I heard Satyamurti say Harischandra was a warning, not an example. I spoke as a man of faith, it is true. How else could I enter the field? The honest fact was, I felt and spoke out of the fulness of feeling. One doesn't always remember one's latest self, one's previous selves keep coming up." His rationalism was superimposed on a deep-lying faith embedded in the layers of his deeper self which "kept coming up" in moments of challenge and crisis. One striking instance I shall narrate: On February 19, 1945, the Gokhale Day, he lost consciousness while he was narrating a tender episode in his master's life. A doctor immediately attended to him and he regained consciousness. He was taken home when again he felt ill and thought he was collapsing. At that moment of what he believed was his imminent dissolution, he asked that the *Bhakti* Chapter of *The Gita* should be read to him. Soon he revived and asked some passage from Shakespeare to be read! His "latest self" asserted itself!

Sastri had faith, but not easy faith. He wrote: "From a boy, slogans and panaceas have left me cold. Only the highways of philosophy for me. *Swamis* and *yogis*, givers of the sacred ash and whisperers of miracle-working mantras have never allured me. The new and short-lived *isms* that infest this fair home of genuine speculation and philosophy and promise us shortcuts to salvation have passed by without quickening my spiritual pulse. I cannot sign away my judgement in any sphere to another, however great and worthy."*

* "The Other Harmony", Pp. 5, 6

Sastri never stood on moral stilts, spiritual pride being foreign to his nature. But he was an exemplar of the highest virtues and his was a life of sacrifice according to the highest standards of our *Dharma*. He was essentially unworldly and did not care for earthly possessions. He worshipped Truth as devoutly as Mahatma Gandhi. Though he did not avow himself an extreme pacifist or a thoroughgoing votary of non-violence, he was far on the road and always stood for the path of peace, harmony, mutual help and mutual love. Above all, he believed in the triumph of *Dharma* (righteousness). With the din of a disastrous war all round and the threatened crash of human values, he clung to them with unbending faith. In a broadcast of 1940 he said: "Man has ever bowed the knee to power, and it does not take him long—alas! contemporary events make it too plain—to forget the dignity of the human soul, to pull down the images of mercy and to install in their places the hideous symbols of despotism and cruelty. We all want great things done for us in India, don't we? Only we want them done in proper ways, justly not harshly, slowly if need be but surely. What is done in a hurry is undone in a hurry too. Wait and see how long Hitler's conquests last after him. True we want the throne of independence, but shall we wade through slaughter to a throne? Shall India, like Germany (of Hitler) shut the gates of mercy on mankind?" It is this indestructible faith in the invincibility of *Dharma* that makes Sastri an embodiment of the true moral values of India and a worthy representative of her ancient and many-sided culture.

Sastri was greater than the sum of his opinions, traits and actions. His infinite charm, which age did not wither nor custom stale, emanated from the whole of his harmonious personality even as the enthralling magnificence and beauty of the *Taj Mahal* emanates, not from this minaret or

that dome however exquisite, but from its *ensemble*. This is a similitude, I venture to think, most apt to Srinivasa Sastri as well as one he would have loved in his modest way. For, Sastri was an artist to the core, radiating beauty, form, harmony and proportion in all that he did and said.

APPENDIX I

EXTRACTS FROM THE SPEECHES AND WRITINGS OF SRINIVASA SASTRI

1. PUT THE NATION ALWAYS ABOVE PARTY*

(From the address delivered at the Annamalai University Convocation on December 4, 1937)

Parliamentary government postulates the existence of well-organised and coherent parties. The conditions for their proper functioning must be secured beyond all hazard. Politicians who wish to do their bit for the community must submit to a certain amount of control and restriction of the free exercise of their judgement. This being premised, I am concerned here to dwell at some length on the other side of the picture.

One can understand the nation demanding the entire surrender of the citizen, his prospect, his freedom and his life. Can a party push its claims against its members so far? Perhaps the claim is not made in set formulae or stated nakedly in any treatise on public institutions ; but in actual practice, the tendency of party executives is to aggrandize themselves and make continual inroads on the freedom of action and of speech of their members. In the hurry of life we do not remember that by merely joining a party we give up a considerable slice of liberty. A political party, in the search for means of extending its power and prestige, is almost omnivorous. It soon acquires a body of crystallised views upon all subjects under the sun, and a member may be called upon at any time to support them by advocacy and by vote. The theoretical distinction between fundamentals and details, between principles and their particular applications,

* 'The Other Harmony', Pp. 93, 94.

is apt to be lost sight of ; and in the fervour of propaganda and the excitement of combat the word of the party leader must be obeyed, and the tyranny of military discipline tends to be established. The opposition, whose business ought to be to expose the flaws of Government measures, but, when that task is done to examine the measures on their merits and support them where they are worthy of support, opposes for the sake of opposition and gets into the habit of seeing nothing right in the operations of Government and never saying a good word of its adversaries.

It is impossible to be a bondsman in politics and a free man in other departments of life. The truest freedom is the freedom of the mind, and thought can flourish and produce its full effect only when it can find an outlet in speech and action. T. H. Huxley was once asked why he did not care to enter the House of Commons. His answer was that he had dedicated his life to the discovery and elucidation of truth and not to its obscuration, and therefore he avoided the pursuit of politics. I do not think that Huxley overstated his case. Party politics, which forbids independent judgement and compels one to speak and vote at another's bidding, is systematised violence done to truth. Knowing how commonly one is misunderstood, let me at this point repeat my faith in democracy. However bad a legislative chamber may be, as Cavour said, it can never be so bad as the antechamber of an autocrat or, one may add, of a modern dictator. But does it follow that I should join in the apotheosis of party and kneel down before a caucus which regards its slogans as mantras at a ritual and shouts hosannas at every paltry success as though the hosts of heaven had routed the hordes of hell?

I advise you to be faithful to party, but always to put the nation above it. I advise you, when you become leaders, to circumscribe within well-defined limits the jurisdiction of

your party, to demand of your followers due respect for this jurisdiction but scrupulously to allow them full discretion outside that jurisdiction. I advise you not to look upon members of other parties as enemies to be avoided, denounced and injured, but as fellow-travellers choosing different routes to reach the same goal, viz., the common good. I advise you, above all, to cherish your personal freedom as a birthright and guard it jealously except in a limited sphere, so that in your public activities you may be true to yourselves. The ideal to be aimed at is the one enunciated in our ancient saying: *manasyekam vacusyekam karmanyekam mahātmanām*,—"One and the same in thought, word and act". To propagate others' opinions as your own, to make speeches against your convictions and to vote habitually at the bidding of a whip, is to do violence to truth. In this land men have been bidden from ancient days to speak the truth and perform the *dharma*—*satyam vada, dharmam cara*. Truth has been declared to be the foundation and the support of all things—*Satye Sarvam pratisthitam*. In an immortal legend, Harischandra sold his wife and son to slavery and himself watched corpses burning on Ganga's bank, to avoid framing a falsehood between his lips. To keep the plighted word of his father Rama gave up a kingdom and dwelt in the forest for years with his wife. The empire of Truth has no limits and knows no relaxations.

Happily we are not without some shining examples for our guidance. One that will be universally admitted is Mahatma Gandhi. Dedicated body and soul to the service of mankind, he will seek no good, however great or glittering, except by methods wholly consonant with his own conception of right or truth. He protests against people following him blindly and accepting his decisions without endeavouring to make them their own. Yet, so weak is human nature that in the wide circle of his influence people too

readily surrender their individual freedom and so palter with truth. If one of the phases of truth be non-violence, another is the integrity of the human soul. The Mahatma's supreme merit is his unflinching devotion to the goddess of Truth in her various phases. Let us be his co-worshippers, not his worshippers.

2. THE BALANCED MIND

(From the address delivered at the Convocation of the University of Mysore on September 14, 1925)*

Even more than this mental alertness and elasticity, another attribute is distinctive of university culture—the balanced mind. Sad to think, it is also the rarer. I once had to speak to an association of graduates in Australia, and posed the query, “Do modern universities aim at a balanced mind?” From the tenor of the ensuing conversation I could see that other minds had been agitated over the problem. Once upon a time the true mark of a completed course of education was the habit of proving all things before coming to a judgement, the disposition to look at a matter from all points of view, the habit even under exciting circumstances of bringing full and unclouded reason to bear on the subject at issue.

Modern life with its hurry and whirl seems to have banished leisure, poise, serenity of outlook. The countless little details claiming our attention from moment to moment scarcely allow of the formation of a whole and harmonious picture with every feature in true perspective. The newspaper press, shouting and screaming the whole day long, keeps pouring into our minds a chaos of unrelated thoughts. Of any particular object or idea we seem only to catch a

* ‘The Other Harmony’, Pp. 71—74

fleeting phase, an aspect of an aspect. And yet we have to make up our minds, to choose our sides, and to cast our votes. We could not hold our judgements in suspense if we would, and, for a wonder, most of us would not if we could. We do not seem even to care for justice, harmony, co-ordination. In the legislature we hear only partisan views of things, and, if we wish to count for something, we must give partisan votes. How the laws in such a dispensation can be just and suitable is no concern of ours. In the courts, clients, witnesses, advocates, are all naturally for their own side of the case and make no attempt to disguise the fact. The result, as we all know, is that the judge is often hindered from discovering the truth, not helped to do so.

So in the public discussion of questions between conservatives and reformers, capital and labour, and so forth, the active spirits throw themselves heart and soul into one side or other of the dispute. Newspapers, instead of endeavouring to create a sober and healthy public opinion are avowedly partisan and, while presenting their side in attractive colours, consider it no part of their duty to be equally generous to the other side, and in many cases misrepresent, suppress and run it down. So far has this evil grown that young and inexperienced readers, taught only by one set of papers, ascribe innate "cussedness" and moral perversity to the other school of thought and its advocates. Among us the situation is further complicated by the upsurging of the communal spirit, the various sects and factions demanding each its share and more than its share, and leaving the State altogether in the lurch. The modern machinery for striking the balance, commissions, and committees and assessors are but imperfect and untrustworthy approximations. The personnel of these bodies, on which hang vital issues of equity and justice, is itself made a subject of acrimonious contention. Where all are tainted, few can be expected to hold the scales even.

Do our universities—let me put the question though I do not expect an answer—with their ever increasing specialization of studies produce of set purpose the type of mind necessary for discovering the golden mean, the safe middle course between opposing tendencies? Is there no use, even in these tranquil places dedicated to truth and wisdom, for the man who hesitates, who weighs arguments with care, who resists the sway of passion? A recent Governor of one of our provinces, who had been a radical in English politics, turned out to be unprogressive here. He once explained the phenomenon to me. He sought advice from every quarter on a disputed issue, he read all the papers dealing with it. The rights and wrongs seemed to him so equally balanced that the case for change was never wholly made out. So he said, he let the old arrangement continue, it had answered so far. He was a typical conservative, a perfect Hamlet of politics. But surely deliberation is not indecision. It will lead to action quite as often as to inaction. And the action to which it leads will be safe and suited to all the attendant circumstances.

I freely admit that the conscientious politician is not popular. His counsel of patience and moderation is irritating to eager and enthusiastic natures. Yudhishtira was called many ugly names by Bhima and Droupadi. "Unagitated like the sea, immovable like the mountain" he waited till the time arrived and then struck and struck home. The cross bencher is not beloved of his tribe, but the cross-bench mind is an ever-present and an ever-growing need. Believe me, it is no disease, no infirmity. On the other hand, it is the crown and summit of liberal education. It would be an evil day when it became extinct, and the high function of universities is to foster it with tender and unremitting care.

3. THE JOYS OF FREEDOM

(While accepting the Freedom of the City conferred by the Corporation of London on July 29, 1921, Sastri delivered this speech.)*

I am keenly sensible of the great honour I have just received at the hands of the Corporation of London. I accept the Freedom of the City of London not as a personal distinction, but in all sincerity and hopefulness as a symbol and prelude to the conferment on India of the Freedom of the British Empire. On the highest authority the British Empire has been declared to be without distinction of any kind. Neither race nor colour nor religion are to divide man from man so long as they are subjects of this Empire. As in the great temple of Jagannath in my country, where the Brahman and the outcaste, the priest and the pariah, alike join in a common devotion and worship, so in this British Empire—which, by your leave, I will call the greatest Temple of Freedom on this planet—he blasphemes and violates her freedom who raises barriers of one kind or another, or says to his fellow-worshippers “there shalt thou abide, come not near me.”

The joys of freedom are indeed difficult to describe; they can only be fully appreciated by those who have had the misfortune to lose them for a time. With grief and sorrow I occasionally notice that here and there are people who speak of freedom as though it were a mechanical invention, or a quack specific for which they have taken a patent. “Our ancestors”, say they, “have fought, have struggled, have sacrificed and have suffered for freedom. It is ours exclusively. We will not share it with those who have not shared our antecedent troubles, trials and misfortunes to attain it. Come, take it if you can but give it we will not”. I take it that that is not an exalted view of

* ‘The Other Harmony’, Pp. 131—133.

freedom. Humanity would be but a poor witness to the wisdom of the All-Wise, if an experience were to yield benefit only to those who had gone through it. History would be a dead thing, all our trials and misfortunes would be in vain, if we compelled posterity in its turn to go through similar ordeals. What a man has fought for and won he must without reserve or qualification share with his fellowmen. Sanitarians preach that you can never enjoy the best health in your house till your surroundings are also well developed in the matter of hygiene. Philosophers tell us that you can best seek your own happiness only by serving for the happiness of others. So, I believe no man will enjoy to the fullest measure the blessings of freedom unless he shares them to the full with his fellowmen.

Like culture, like knowledge, like virtue, and like spiritual merit, freedom is such that, the more it is given, the more it grows ; and the more it taxes the vigilance and energy of a people, the more beauty, grace and richness it adds to their life. He who would circumscribe freedom to particular areas and to certain peoples knows not what he is doing ; for, he is taking away from humanity a possible contribution to its richness and glory, a contribution which I take it to be the will of Providence that every race, every people should make in its own good time.

So, ladies and gentlemen, if you have come into this great heritage of freedom, representative institutions, Parliamentary Government and every form of human equality which civilizations have evolved, be not like the miser who keepeth his goods to himself but gets no benefit from them, only evoking the envy and hatred of the neighbourhood and, alas, even of his own family. Rather let it be said of you that you kept not the best for yourselves and your children and grand-children unto remote generations ;

rather let this be said of your country in regard to India: "England took charge of a people divided from her by colour, by race and by culture. She fitted them for the tasks of empire, and when the time was ripe she gladly admitted them to be full and equal partners in the glory of empire and the service of humanity."

4. THE IDEAL OF A UNITED INDIAN NATION

(From a talk broadcast over A.I.R., Madras—1942)

All through my public life, whether as teacher or subsequently as politician, a noble vision has shed its lustre on my path. Pray do not consider this as propaganda or as controversy. It is a sober statement of conviction. The pioneers of the political movement of our country, going back to the days before the National Congress, dreamed of a united India and a united Indian people. Sometimes they called them a nation, sometimes they called them a nationality; but always they conceived of them as one whole. They knew that Asoka and Akbar had dreamed the great dream, and hoped that it could be realised under the aegis of Britain. When I was a lad at school, Surendra Nath Banerjee thundered forth the evolution of the Indian nation and made the names of Mazzini, Cavour and Garibaldi familiar to our ears. In the west, Ranade enforced the same lesson from the press and the platform, showing how the different cultures that had been thrown together, Hindu, Moslem, Sikh, Parsi and Christian, were blending gradually to form one rich composite Indian culture, how furthermore this process of amalgamation was going forward to its consummation through peaceful and constitutional means, and how patriots should devote themselves to this great purpose in a spirit of sacrifice and suffering. I taught this doctrine to thousands of students. The thought of two or more Indias makes me mad. I cannot bear to hear of it.

Tell me, dear friends, don't you feel elated and buoyed up when you see in your mind's eye the Prime Minister of India, drawing himself up to full height at the Council-table of the Britannic Commonwealth or at that of the future world-order and speaking in the name of 390 millions with a voice and authority equal to that of Winston Churchill or Field-Marshal Smuts? Before my day is done, I trust fervidly and devoutly, the idea of a united Indian nation that I have always cherished will be placed beyond all danger.

5. WELCOME POLITICAL OPPONENTS AS YOUR ALLIES*

(From an address delivered at the Nagpur University—1935)

What is the view that we should take of our political opponents? I should like you to ponder over this subject while still you are young. Do not consider them as your enemies, consider them as those who supply a deficiency in your education or in your political outlook; regard them as people who are supplementary, who are designed by the economy of human relationships just to give you that which by your upbringing, by your partial leanings and prejudices, you are for the moment without. That is the point of view which a really good citizen, seeking the welfare of the public and not merely the temporary triumph of his cause, should take; that is the point of view from which political opposition should be considered and made a part of our care. To take another view, to bring the bitterness of enmity and lifelong animosity and the habits of uncritical depreciation, constant abuse and vilification, and ascription of unworthy motives to people on the other side is not merely to do wrong to the other persons but, it is to yourselves a disservice of the worst possible character. It must affect your nature, it must poison the

* 'The Other Harmony'—P. 90.

springs of your character at the very source. It must keep you to the superficialities of life, it must make you an imperfect instrument of God's will.

I use strong language because I am addressing the young particularly, and I hope that when I present the ugly and the black aspect of our public life I do not speak from a heart surcharged with enmity or hatred of any person. It seems to me that by the practice of politics we are degrading what ought to be an instrument of public welfare into an instrument of public degradation. When you come of age and take your hand in politics and assume prominent positions upon one side or upon the other, whether office rewards you at the end or titles and decorations adorn your breast, whatever your future may be, learn how to welcome as allies opponents who open more sides of a question than you can yourself see, give you as it were four eyes where God has given you only two. You and your political opponents may be pulling the string opposite ways, and, for that reason you may pull strongly, you may pull vigorously, you may make cries like the American boy-buglers just to call out your strength in full, but it is only for the purpose, believe me, of achieving the common object. At bottom all of us are friends and should recognize that we are friends.

6. ELIMINATE COLOUR PREJUDICE

(From a paper read at the Rotary International, Madras, on 23rd March, 1943)*

One dreaded enemy of peace, one potent cause of war, remains still to be considered. It is colour prejudice. Of its malignant possibilities the world has still no clear perception. Let us hope these possibilities will be understood betimes and prevented from ever taking shape or form. There is no calculating the harm it has done in the past.

Shall mankind rise above it ? There are white communities who sincerely believe that the coloured races were created to serve them. Hindus with their caste system consigning people by their birth to lowly occupations will understand the disabilities of colour, which admits of no remedy. The fate of the Harijan community must give us pause in condemning the harsh treatment accorded to coloured races where white people dominate. There is, however, one circumstance in India which redeems the situation in part. The law of this country is against caste discrimination, and it is administered in a liberal spirit. Enlightened public opinion too is decidedly unfavourable to caste tyranny and caste pride. In South Africa, on the contrary, both the law and its working are hostile to coloured people and public opinion is even more so. The Dominions have closed the door against coloured immigration though enormous spaces are unpeopled. At the present moment the white inhabitants of Durban, predominantly British by origin, are conducting one of their periodical agitations against their Indian fellow-citizens without a sense of responsibility. The Negro of the Southern States of America is far yet from enjoying the rights of citizenship given him by the law, though cases of lynching are less common than formerly, and it is some time since one read of the weird and lawless activities of the Ku Klux Klan.

When the last great peace was fashioned at Versailles in 1920 the delegation of Japan demanded that principle of equality between coloured and colourless peoples should be formally recognised. But it was turned down. When the issue is raised this time, as it will be, by the united eastern nations, let us hope that it will be accepted without a demur and with grace. Repetition of the blunder will be high treason against posterity, besides being an ignoble betrayal of the ideals that seers and saints have taught in the past.

There is no need, however, to catalogue the manifestations of colour prejudice. Suffice it to say that its magnitude may well alarm those that are interested in the future of humanity. If unchecked, it may lead to bloody wars. Once they begin, they will set the East against the West and fill all the continents with ruin and carnage.

On the white peoples of the earth and on every man and woman among them there rests a heavy responsibility—that of learning to look upon coloured persons as equal and entitled to the good things of the world in equal measure with themselves. The required change of heart is of slow growth and must be carefully fostered in the schools, while yet the children's minds are plastic. It is needless to add that the coloured races for their part must change their attitude towards their white brethren in a spirit of friendly response, shed their fear and inferiority complex and show a measure of confidence and trustfulness.

7. THE INTERNATIONAL MIND

(From a paper read at the Rotary International, Madras, on 23rd March, 1943.)*

We are now prepared to consider the type of persons who should be entrusted with the duty of guarding and maintaining the world's peace in future. What qualities should we look for in them besides ability, tact, character, refinement and so on that we expect in men and women holding responsible positions? In one word, the international mind. The crass nationalism, known by the dignified name of patriotism, they must shed. In spirit they must belong to the world, not merely to a country or nation. It is not easy, this emancipation. On the contrary, it is a difficult discipline, in which backsliding accords with one's habits and ways of thought and feeling, and progress depends

* 'The Other Harmony'—Pages 144—145.

on the vivid perception of larger view-points than one is used to and the firm grasp of wider notions of justice and more comprehensive ideas of human welfare.

Of old, when the schoolmen talked of the citizenship of the world, it was perhaps a term of derision. Spread over an area scarcely known to its full extent, stretched to peoples mostly unknown and unheard of, and never exercised in concrete tasks of benevolent service of which the results could be seen day by day, the citizenship of the world could not acquire even in a life-time any degree of warmth or compelling stimulus to action. No wonder the cynic said that such a person loved every country but his own, and bestowed his unavailing brotherliness, not on men, but on man. But in the higher administrative ranks of the Secretariat of the International Authority, in the military services, in the judicial tribunal, and in the various special commissions appointed by the Authority, an officer comes into daily contact with persons belonging to many lands and many races, handles their affairs and appreciates their special attitudes to life, their contentions and their ambitions. His knowledge of the world and his labours for its various peoples will be real and purposeful, so that his citizenship of the world will be an active and lively emotion. He may have to take decisions against his government; he may have to conduct military operations against his nation; he may have to deliver adverse verdicts against the authorities of his country. On such occasions he must learn to assume the necessary detachment without a qualm or special effort. Ideas of great reach like the oneness of humanity, the parliament of man and the federation of the world must become familiar ground on which his mind moves with habitual ease. His sympathies must attain catholicity; his unreasoned prejudices must wither and drop away, mode and object of worship, style of dress, food, colour of skin—towards these in their wide

variety his toleration and sympathy must flow with the readiness of nature. It may be advisable, in appointing to offices under the International Authority, to require of the candidates that they will, to the extent of their capacity, cultivate the international mind, look upon all States and all nations with absolute impartiality and serve all with equal zeal and equal fidelity.

8. IMMORTAL RAMAYANA*

One immortal product of the human mind I have kept to the end. The *Ramayana*, I hold to be almost without a rival in the world's literature. Whether we judge by the grandeur of the theme, by the variety of characters portrayed, by the tone of its idealism, or by the appeal that it makes to the devout heart, it ranks amongst the noblest monuments of the poetic genius. To those who cannot read it in the original, I would unhesitatingly recommend resort to translations. Even through media the narrative shines with rich brilliance. The wise say that if you cannot scale the Himalayas you would do well to go to the foot and take in the infinite variety of nature that meets the eye.

All parts of the book reward the reverent reader. But we may not expect homogeneity of treatment in a composition of its size. The pious pupil has therefore by long tradition selected certain kandas and sargas for repeated study and ascribed to each selection specific forms of mystic or worldly efficacy. I open the book at all times and with no particular expectation of improved health or auspicious prognostication. It never fails me. The distilled experience of ages is given in stanzas of exquisite sententious grace. Hermitages, described with wealth of household and sacrificial detail, invite you as to the intimacy of home. Forests and mountains and rivers, in pristine untamed gran-

* The Other Harmony— pp. 159-163

deur, lose their terror in Valmiki's pages, for while he mentions with particularity the paths and thorny lanes, the river-fords and the giant shelter-giving trees, he makes only occasional and unexciting allusions to the bloody fights and devastations of beasts of prey, the bites and stings of poisonous insects, and the diseases and deformities caused by them, the movements from untenable to promising spots, of hamlets harassed by flood and fire and famine. A seeming exception is mentioned towards the end of *Ayodhya kanda*. A colony of rishis migrate, to escape the cannibal Khara and his followers. They invite Rama and party to join, but these decline.

Ah, how I should love to learn and teach in those sanctuaries, guru and sishya bathing in safe pools together, chanting the Vedas aloud till the hills threw the sacred sounds back and the sylvan gods sat up and listened, our mutual companionship unperturbed by fear of lightning strikes or menacing processions or shootings by the king's police ?

Of the countless benefits—one may even call them blessings—that the *Ramayana* can confer the highest is the training of the emotions and of the spirit. Of the lessons it teaches, the highest seems to me to be the exaltation of *dharma*. On its altar everything must be sacrificed, reverently and cheerfully. To fulfil his father's promises and save his honour, Rama twice renounced the kingdom of Kosala, once in Ayodhya when his father offered it, and later in Chitrakuta when Bharata laid it at his feet. The passages in which this self-denial is narrated are among the noblest in the poem. The debate between the brothers is a gem without price. We are told that the gods came down to listen, for even amongst them such high arguments were seldom heard. Bharata was tired out and, though neither confounded nor struck dumb, gave in. But it is remarkable that at heart he seems to have been unconvinced. Nor was

Lakshmana converted to the stern view to the end. Next only to Sri Rama in sublimity of character, why did they not catch his perception of duty? Vasishtha too seems to have fallen short of the theme. I dare not dogmatize, but shall ask leave to suggest timidly that the poet meant them as foils so that his hero may stand on an unapproachable pedestal.

If Rama was prepared for dire penalties in paying his father's debts, what would he not suffer to pay his own? When Sita remonstrated with him for taking other people's quarrels on his own head and inviting unnecessary risks, he proclaimed the sanctity of his word once given and swore he would abandon her, Lakshmana and life itself before abandoning a promise. These high protestations were put to the test ere long. Not indeed in an attempt to maintain his fidelity to a solemn undertaking. For *dharma*, inexorable *dharma*, came to him in diverse forms. His personal honour and the purity of the Ikshvaku race were inextricably mixed and no sacrifice was too great to preserve it. Twice when his queen's name was called in question, he threw her to the wolves. Then Lakshmana's life lay forfeit when he left his post of duty under the cruel compulsion of circumstances. Vasishtha had to intercede to get the penalty commuted into banishment. The immolations ordered by Rama were at first loudly protested against; but as the iron strength of his will became known, people submitted as to the decrees of blind fate. This is eloquent testimony not only to the semipiternal validity of the ideals that he enforced, but to the mighty ascendancy that he established over the hearts of those that came under his influence. The author who conceived and delineated the character of Rama in such convincing detail as we have in the Ramayana is a supreme genius. Poet, prophet or seer has seldom presented to the mind of man so noble an apotheosis of duty.

APPENDIX II

MAIN EVENTS IN SASTRI'S LIFE

- 1869 22nd September : Born at Valangaiman, near Kumbakonam in Thanjavur District.
- 1883 Passes matriculation with high distinction. (Educated at Native High School, Kumbakonam under the famous headmaster, Appu Sastri.) Marriage with Parvati.
- 1885 Passes F. A. in the I Class at the Government College, Kumbakonam.
- 1887 Passes B. A. in the I Class.
- 1888 Joins Law College but gives it up, and becomes teacher in the Municipal High School, Mayavaram
- 1891 Undergoes training in the Teachers' College, Saidapet.
- 1892 Rejoins Municipal High School, Mayavaram.
- 1893 Becomes lecturer in English, Municipal College, Salem.
- 1895 Joins Pachaiyappa's College High School.
- 1896 Wife Parvati's death.
- 1897 Marriage with Lakshmi.
- 1899 Becomes Headmaster, Hindu High School, Triplicane, Madras.
- 1906 First meeting with Gokhale.
- 1907 Admission to the Servants of India Society.
- 1908 Works for the formation of District Congress Committees in Madras.
- 1910 Elected as a Fellow of the Madras University.
- 1911 Secretary, Madras Provincial Congress Committee.

- 1913 Nominated to the Madras Legislative Council. Introduces a bill to accord legal sanction for marriage of girls after puberty.
- 1914 Gives evidence before the Royal Commission on Public Services.
- 1915 February 19, Gokhale passes away. Sastri succeeds him as President of the Servants of India Society.
Helps in the reunion of Congress groups.
- 1916 Elected to the Imperial Legislative Council. Publishes a pamphlet entitled *Self-Government for India under the British Flag*. Publishes a pamphlet, the *Congress-League Scheme—an Exposition*.
- 1917 Presides over the Bombay Provincial Conference held at Nasik.
- 1918 Delivers his famous speech opposing the Rowlatt Bill in the Imperial Legislative Council. Montagu-Chelmsford Reform proposals. Conflict in the Congress over the acceptance of the proposals. Sastri and the Servants of India Society decide to secede from the Congress, which rejected the proposals, and join the Conference of Moderates.
Member, Franchise Committee headed by Lord Southborough.
- 1919 Visits England as a member of the Moderate delegation.
Gives evidence before the British Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Reform proposals.
- 1920 Sastri not happy over secession from Congress. Attends the Delhi Congress with a view to persuade Congress to accept Reform proposals.

Member of the Railways Committee with Acworth as Chairman.

Elected to the Council of State under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms.

- 1921 A delegate to the Imperial Conference in London.

A delegate of the Indian Government to the League of Nations.

Made a Privy Councillor.

Member of the British Empire delegation to the Conference on Naval Disarmament at Washington.

- 1922 Presides over the Provincial Liberal Conference in Bombay.

Tours Australia, Canada and New Zealand in response to the invitation of the Premiers of these dominions. The primary object of the mission to the dominions was to induce the respective Governments to give practical effect to the resolution of the Imperial Conference of 1921 which affirmed the rights of Indians in the dominions to full citizenship.

- 1923 Presides over the National Liberal Federation at Nagpur.

Presents on behalf of the Government of India to the Colonial Office in London the case for full citizenship and racial equality for Indians in Kenya.

Deep disappointment with the refusal of the British cabinet to accept Indian claims, followed by illness and rest at Bangalore.

Proposes that the Empire exhibition in London should be boycotted by India.

- 1924 Goes on a mission to England along with Mrs. Besant to present to the British public the case for further political reforms in India.
- 1925 Delivers the Kamala Lectures at the Calcutta University on the 'The Indian Citizen: His Rights and Duties.'
- 1926 Goes to South Africa as a member of the Habiullah Deputation to attend the Indo-South African Conference at Capetown.
- 1927 Agent General of the Government of India in South Africa.
Conquers the hostility of the Whites against the Indians and establishes better relations between the Indians and the Whites. Founds the Sastri College, Durban, for the higher education of Indians in South Africa.
- 1928 Declines the offer of K. C. S. I.
Member, Royce Commission on Labour.
Member of the delegation of the Indian Government to give evidence before the Hilton-Young Royal Commission on the closer union of East African territories.
- 1929 Made a Companion of Honour.
- 1930 Member of the First Round Table Conference in London.
His conversion to Federation.
- 1931 Helps in the mediation which resulted in the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.
Member, Second Round Table Conference.
Receives the Freedom of the City of Edinburgh.
- 1932 Attends the Second Round Table Conference on Indo-African affairs at Capetown.
- 1934 Mrs. Sastri passes away.

- 1935 Delivers the Mysore University Extension Lectures on Gokhale.
Appointed Vice-Chancellor of the Annamalai University.
Invited to form a Ministry in * Madras when Congress refused to take up office; declines the invitation.
- 1936 Goes to Malaya as a delegate of the Government of India to inquire into the conditions of Indian labour.
- 1937 Nominated to the Madras Legislative Council.
- 1940 Delivers the Dr. Abayambal Memorial Lectures on the status of women, at the Mysore University.
- 1941 Writes autobiographical sketches in Tamil to the *Swadesamitran Weekly*.
- 1943 Delivers lectures on Sir Pherozeshah Mehta.
- 1944 Publication of *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*.
Delivers lectures on the *Ramayana*.
- 1945 Publication of *The Other Harmony*.
Opposes Jinnah's demand for the partition of India.
- 1946 Publication of *Thumbnail Sketches and My Master Gokhale*.
Declining health—Gandhiji visits him in Madras.
Passes away on Wednesday, April 17.

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